



ICMA

JOB HUNTING HANDBOOK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROFESSIONALS

ICMA | membership

ABOUT ICMA

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics. ICMA provides member support; publications; data and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to more than 12,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect millions of individuals living in thousands of communities, from small villages and towns to large metropolitan areas.

Job Hunting Handbook for Local Government Professionals
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INTRODUCTION

Job hunting is a fact of life that is faced by virtually every university graduate and local government professional. On the one hand, it can be exciting to find a new job, a new community, or a new challenge. On the other, the process can be time-consuming and anxiety-producing. Striking a balance between these two extremes and preparing yourself for the road ahead will require a deliberate approach. No matter where you are in your career, at some point you'll probably need to go about the work of scouting job opportunities, developing application materials, researching a new position and/or community, interviewing, and negotiating a compensation package.

Because job hunting is so universal, ICMA periodically initiates a task force to review and update the organization's Job Hunting Handbook. Members of the 2021-2022 task force are listed on the following page, and this revision is based on their work. Members of the previous task forces are listed in Appendix A, as the current handbook is built on the work of many members over the years.

Just as the last revision acknowledged the need to expand the scope of the prior handbook beyond its focus on those seeking CAO positions, the current revision has incorporated trends in networking and social media.

This handbook is designed for public administration students, recent graduates, and young professionals in their first or second job as well as experienced administrators who are seeking positions later in their careers. It is also based on the recognition that there are many career paths in local government—that local government professionals may pursue careers as department staff, department heads, assistants, or chief administrative officers (CAOs), and that they may come into local government from other fields, such as the military. ICMA also recognizes that some job-seekers have been terminated from their previous position, and their job search may differ in various ways from that of others. For that reason, ICMA has published [The Member's Guide to a Career that has Ups, Downs, and Detours](#) specifically for members in transition.

Although many graduates with an interest in local government follow a relatively straightforward path—administrative assistant, assistant to the manager, assistant manager, manager—others start their careers in a department and either continue in a departmental specialty or make a transition to general management later in their careers.

Whatever your background, experience, and career goals, ICMA hopes this handbook will help you navigate the complexities of job hunting and land the position you want.

TASK FORCE ON UPDATING THE ICMA JOB HUNTING HANDBOOK (2021–2022)

Following are the members of the Task Force on Updating the ICMA Job Hunting Handbook, with their affiliations at the time of service on the task force:

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PLANNING

As a member of ICMA, you are fully aware of the rewards of working in local government. Professionals in local government consistently make a difference by providing professional, quality service to a community, its residents and businesses. As a local government professional, it's your duty to take proactive responsibility for your own career development and work to create your own opportunities. Your approach to career planning depends on where you are in your career:

- Just starting out?
- Mid-management?
- Department head, deputy, or assistant manager?
- City or county manager or administrator?
- Employee in another sector (private or nonprofit, military, state or federal government) seeking to transition to local government?

Regardless of where you may be, ongoing career planning is essential to a satisfying and successful professional experience. For additional ideas, look at the blog post [Charting Your Future by Developing Your Own Personal Strategic Plan](#), based on an ICMA Coaching Program webinar. Appendix B describes ICMA's wide selection of career guides that provide resources for professionals at every stage.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

The first step in planning is self-assessment, which involves considering what you want in a job, assessing your strengths and weaknesses, and identifying areas for improvement and development. Self-assessment requires reflection and honesty. It is best done away from work when you can spend some time thinking about what you do best and what you want in your next position:

- What do you see as your next step and how does it move you toward your long-term goals?

IN THIS CHAPTER

No matter where you are in your career, planning is essential to your professional future. This chapter will guide you through the key steps you need to take:

- Conduct a self-assessment to understand your strengths and areas for development.
- Outline the steps you need to take to identify opportunities and carry out a plan.
- Develop a network to expand your contacts and sources of information.
- Identify one or more mentors to provide coaching, feedback, and encouragement.

This chapter ends with a special section for early-career or first-time job-seekers.

Transitioning from another field?

If you're hoping to move into local government from the private or nonprofit sector, the military, or another level of government, take a look at ICMA's [Breaking into Local Government: A Guidebook for Career Changers](#).

ICMA has these resources specifically for managers transitioning from military careers:

- [Veterans Guide to Finding a Job in Local Government](#)
- [Other employment resources for veterans](#)
- What is your work/management style? Are you an innovator or a problem-solver?

- Is geography important to you? Do you want to work in a rural area, an urban area, or in a specific state or region?
- Do you prefer working in a large organization or in a smaller one where you might have more decision-making responsibility?
- What are your technical strengths—finance? economic development? public safety?

Most professional local government positions require a bachelor's degree and frequently a master's degree—generally in public administration, planning, or finance, depending on the individual's chosen career path. Additional assets are such intangibles as leadership, patience, common sense, flexibility, and a continual quest for learning.

An important part of ICMA's mission is to advance professional local government by providing opportunities for learning and skills enhancement for management professionals. Through the ICMA University, local government administrators and staff have a range of opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills. The foundation for all of ICMA's work is the [Practices for Effective Local Government Management and Leadership](#), a set of competencies and skills developed by ICMA members and considered essential for every local government manager. As a member of ICMA, you should actively assess your abilities according to the Practices. ICMA's [Management Assessment](#) is one tool that can help in this process.

CAREER PLANNING

Career planning involves seeking out opportunities rather than waiting for them to come to you. It requires that you commit yourself to taking chances. In developing your plan, identify specific goals, actions, and timelines. The goals you set should focus on areas for improvement identified in your self-assessment.

Take the initiative to identify one or more mentors or coaches within the profession. A mentor is an individual who is dedicated to your well-being and career advancement and may also serve as a coach during your career. Having multiple mentors can bring useful perspectives to specific issues. Some people think of their mentors as a “personal

board of directors” or an “army of advocates.” Engage them as resources, work diligently to maintain positive and mutually beneficial relationships, and be open to constructive feedback. In addition, network with others in the profession by becoming actively involved and learning about their experiences.

Other steps in career planning are discussed later in this handbook:

- Begin to identify organizations and assignments in which you can develop a network and gain valuable experience.
- Keep yourself informed of trends in local government and what's going on in cities and counties; read ICMA's [Leadership Matters](#) and [SmartBrief](#).
- Assess your résumé and cover letter.
- Brush up your interview skills.
- Gain an understanding of compensation issues.

Career planning is an active and ongoing process. Conceive it, believe in it, and then implement it.

NETWORKING AND HAVING A MENTOR

Pursuing a good career opportunity can be both challenging and rewarding, and networking can help you along the way.

You can start building your network within your organization and neighboring jurisdictions, but you can expand it statewide and nationally through association memberships, conferences, and networking events. People in your network can help you find others in your desired career field, identify strong opportunities, and avoid some of the mistakes they made and overcome some of the hurdles they faced earlier in their own careers. On occasion those in your network will notify you of position openings and place a good word to help you land an interview. But even when this does not occur, it is important to recognize that those in your network can still provide many benefits throughout your career, some of which are intangible and may not be realized for many years.

A valuable resource at this stage—and throughout your career—are [ICMA Senior Advisors](#) in many

states. Senior advisors are retired managers with extensive experience who volunteer their time to provide a unique source of outside counsel to city and county managers and administrators. They are available to meet periodically with ICMA members to discuss the profession and concerns, including career development.

Within your network you may find a few mentor-mentee relationships that form naturally. However, you should be intentional in seeking a few experienced and knowledgeable individuals who are willing and able to serve as mentors to guide you through your career journey and help when you need to make decisions about next steps. A good mentor can help you identify resources to assist you with various transitions, evaluate career opportunities, sharpen your résumé and cover letter, and prepare for an interview by providing pointers and conducting mock interviews.

An important role of a mentor is to identify and correct mistakes, and even put things in a positive light so you can turn “failures” into learning opportunities. A great mentor will also help to inspire and motivate you when landing a new job is taking longer than you had expected or isn’t going as smoothly as you had hoped. The process may be humbling, but the growth from the experience is invaluable.

You can develop and expand your network through opportunities offered by organizations like these:

- [ICMA](#)
- [Engaging Local Government Leaders](#)
- [Your state city/county management association](#)
- Your local [American Society for Public Administration](#) (ASPA) chapter
- Local government management organizations in some large metropolitan areas
- Assistants’ associations in some states
- Specialized associations for accounting, budgeting, planning, and other technical areas
- ICMA’s national affiliates:
 - [The Local Government Hispanic Network](#)

- [The National Association of County Administrators](#)
- [The National Forum for Black Public Administrators](#)
- [SheLeadsGov](#)

Seeking volunteer opportunities through these organizations will create pathways to growing your network by working with other local government professionals who are at different stages of their careers or who share similar backgrounds and/or experiences.

Once you have started your career and begun to gain experience in your chosen field, it’s still important to continue maintaining and expanding your network. By doing this, you build your portfolio while bringing added value to your organization; it can also be beneficial when you transition to a new organization or advance within your current one. Many organizations provide cost-effective opportunities for you to maintain and grow your professional network, particularly at their annual conferences, where you can interact and discuss issues in a supportive environment.

Harness the power of thanking your mentors and networking contacts. Expressing your heartfelt gratitude reinforces supportive career relationships. A great way to honor those in your network who have assisted and mentored you is by serving as a mentor to others. You can encourage those who are just beginning in their careers and assist them by sharing how you overcame some of the hurdles you faced when you began. And in so doing, you can help support the ICMA mission “to advance professional local government through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics.”

FINDING YOUR FIRST (OR SECOND) JOB IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

This handbook provides a wealth of advice for job-seekers at all stages of their careers. Some of it is relevant primarily to those in mid-management or senior positions, because the recruitment and selection processes generally become increasingly complex at these levels. But if you’re looking for your first local government job, or if you’re at another stage early in your career, this section is for you.

Networking and mentoring

Pay special attention to the coverage of “Networking and Having A Mentor,” starting on page 8. Networking can serve as a powerful exchange of ideas and information about future or current job opportunities. It’s a way to build professional contacts and interact with other professionals. Tap MPA program directors, professors, career counselors, and alumni from your academic program who work in local government. Join one or more of the organizations listed in the “Networking and having a mentor” section and take advantage of their conferences and other events—in person or online. Students often enjoy reduced registration rates, and online offerings can be particularly cost-effective.

Benefits of the Local Government Management Fellowship

Local Government Management Fellows enjoy the following benefits:

- Complimentary ICMA membership for two years
- Complimentary registration for the ICMA Annual Conference
- Complimentary registration for an ICMA Regional Conference
- Complimentary access to ICMA’s [Management Assessment](#)
- Complimentary subscription to [PM Magazine](#)
- Access to a network of current and past Fellows
- Discounted access to the [Local Government Online 101 Certificate](#) Program.

Finally, consider opportunities to volunteer in your community. Oftentimes, young professionals can gain valuable experience through volunteering while also making some worthwhile contacts.

A mentor is a professional who is dedicated to your well-being and career advancement and who can also serve as an advocate and/or coach

during your career. You may identify a mentor through networking, or you can seek one by taking advantage of ICMA’s [Coaching Program](#), which offers opportunities for one-to-one coaching through CoachConnect. An [ICMA Senior Advisor](#) is another good source of support and suggestions.

Local Government Management Fellowship Program

An estimated 200 local government professionals have launched their careers by participating in ICMA’s [Local Government Management Fellowship](#) (LGMF) Program. About 100 of the 400 LGMF alumni are senior managers or CAOs. Recent graduates of M.P.A. or public policy programs who are passionate about public service can apply. Successful applicants are placed in full-time management-track positions with a local government for one to two years, and senior-level executives in the host government offer mentoring.

Opportunities for students

If you’re still a student, check out ICMA’s resources for students and interns and find out whether your school has an [ICMA Student Chapter](#) (more than 100 schools have chapters). If you’re currently pursuing a degree, be sure to include that in the “Education” section of your résumé—but if the degree has not yet been awarded, be sure to make that very clear.

Finding openings

As you start searching for your first job, don’t rule out a variety of entry-level positions and even temporary positions; experience will enhance your résumé even if it’s not your “dream job.” Your network can help you find vacant positions. Here are some additional sources:

- [ICMA Job Center](#)
- ICMA’s [Directory of Executive Search Firms](#)
- Websites of [state and national local government organizations](#)
- Social Media (e.g., LinkedIn).

Thinking about your résumé

You probably have more résumé-worthy experience than you think you do! Appendix C provides detailed guidance for preparing a

résumé, and the accompanying sidebar provides tips for you. As an entry-level or early-career applicant, you can offer examples of experience and accomplishments as a student or a summer employee that relate to the requirements of the job you want:

- Internships
- College jobs
- Summer employment
- Significant class projects
- Relevant extra-curricular or volunteer activities.

Other considerations

You'll find advice for early-career job-seekers throughout this guide. Briefly,

- Even if you don't have much work experience, you can identify people to serve as references. Current or former professors, faculty advisors, or leaders in organizations you've volunteered for can comment on your work ethic, professionalism, and abilities.
- If you're a recent graduate, be prepared for a prospective employer to ask for a transcript of your grades, but don't include one with your application.

Résumé tips for early-career job-seekers

1. Develop a chronological résumé that is easy to follow. Provide a one sentence description of each position you've held, the name of the organization including the city and state, the population of the city, and then indicate your accomplishments while you held that job. Lead with your education and provide references and their contact information on the résumé if possible.
2. Quantify, quantify, quantify! If you coordinated volunteers or supervised employees, indicate the number of people involved. If you were responsible for a budget, indicate the amount of the budget. If you did fundraising, indicate the amount raised.
3. Account for all gaps in your résumé. Do not give recruiters or human resource professionals a good reason to set your résumé aside.
4. If you've had experience in a field that you do not believe is relevant to the position, still include it. First, it will keep you from having a gap in your résumé. Second, more and more employers are looking for candidates with a diversity of experience.
5. Avoid flowery career objectives or sections that list adjectives describing your skill sets. Instead, use your valuable résumé space to describe accomplishments that demonstrate those qualities.
6. Include a section that shows your volunteer activities, whether or not those are professionally related. Include coaching, service organizations, or not-for-profit groups you may be involved in.
7. Include your skills with social media, website development, database management, and other office-related software programs. These are skills highly desired by employers.
8. Be sure to include references to research skills, writing abilities, and teams you participated in. If you drafted reports or wrote letters for elected or appointed officials, reference that.
9. Always, always, always develop a one-page, well-written cover letter that is specific to the position. An e-mail transmitting your résumé is not a cover letter. In developing your cover letter, try to tie your experience to the position.
10. If you've had a favorable media article written about you or you authored a short professional article or blog post, consider including it with your résumé.

Source: Heidi Voorhees, Co-Owner, GovHR USA, LLC

- Although you've probably heard a lot of talk about employment agreements, those generally apply to senior positions. Early-career employees are more likely to be offered an appointment letter rather than a full-scale contract. The letter should specify

the position, the terms of employment, and the compensation.

Job-hunting is a time-consuming and sometimes frightening process, but diligent work and a positive attitude should pave the way for a successful career.

PREPARATION

Preparation is the key to a successful job search, and the preparation phase includes finding vacancies that you're interested in applying for, doing your homework by learning as much as you can about each position and community, preparing your résumé and cover letter, selecting and contacting professional references, and assessing and managing your online reputation. Also, if you're seeking a senior position, making your interest known to an executive recruiter is an important step that you may want to consider. You should not feel that you're on your own, adrift in the turbulent sea of job hunting. Whether you're seeking specific leads on available positions or general advice about career options and job-hunting approaches, many resources are available to you.

Before you begin, however, you should reflect for a moment on two factors that are themes throughout this handbook: your responsibilities under the [ICMA Code of Ethics](#) and the strong possibility that your job search will take place at least partly in the public eye, with no guarantee of confidentiality.

Ethics Integrity and, all being well, a stellar reputation are attributes that you bring to the table along with your education, expertise, and experience. An integral part of a successful job search is maintaining your commitment to the highest ethical standards of the profession. The [ICMA Code of Ethics](#) outlines your professional obligation to present accurate credentials, be respectful of colleagues, keep your word when you accept a position, and honor any commitments you make to your potential employer in order to render a professional service (the sidebar on page 15 shows the guidelines that apply most directly to job hunting). These obligations apply to all ICMA members seeking employment in local government, regardless of position. While this handbook covers in detail those aspects of the Code that specifically address job search issues, it's recommended that you review the entire Code before you launch your

IN THIS CHAPTER

Sound preparation will help ensure that you're ready when the right position becomes available. Here's what you need to do to prepare:

- Seek out leads on available positions.
- Do your homework on positions and communities that interest you.
- Prepare a top-notch résumé and cover letter that can be tailored to specific openings.
- Select professional references.
- Review your online presence to see what potential employers can find out about you.
- Decide whether you want to work with an executive recruiter.

search. Even the most seasoned professionals have found themselves in hot water because they hadn't adequately considered the ethical component of decisions they made during career moves.

Confidentiality Applicants for positions in the public sector should not have any expectation of confidentiality. Often local governments are required by law to disclose the names of applicants and/or those who are on the "short list" for interviews, and this is a question you should investigate when you're doing your "homework" on a jurisdiction. Even if the law doesn't require disclosure, a commitment to transparency, especially in filling very senior positions in the organization, can lead local governments to provide details about potential candidates. You need to be aware of this as you prepare and submit applications, select references, accept invitations for interviews, and visit a new community where you may want to work. You don't want to be surprised if your application becomes public.

FINDING THE VACANCIES

By actively seeking out leads, networking, and keeping up to date on professional reading, you can begin to identify jobs that might be right for you. Here are some resources for identifying job vacancies:

Current and former local government officials

- **ICMA Senior Advisors** in many states and other retired administrators
- Senior ICMA staff
- Executive recruiters
- ICMA's online **Job Center**
- Directors and **staff of state municipal leagues**
- Directors of college and university public administration programs
- Other private, association, and other nonprofit job boards and career networking sites.

Local, regional, state/provincial, and national professional organizations, such as the **National League of Cities**, the **National Association of Counties**, the **National Association of County Administrators**, and the **American Society for Public Administration**. In many cases, you can subscribe to receive notices when positions are posted.

If you're a recent graduate, resources include MPA program directors, professors, alumni, your school's career counseling office, and the **Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration** (NASPAA). Depending on your career focus, you may find direct job postings or leads in newsletters, websites, and other communication vehicles of professional associations in planning, human resources, finance, or other areas. In addition, local governments post current job openings on their own websites and with regional cooperative listing services.

If you're moving to local government from the private sector, be aware that municipal job titles may look unfamiliar. For example, a finance director in the public sector may be analogous to a vice president of finance in the private sector.

Look closely at the job descriptions to see how your skills and qualifications might best meet those being sought in the public sector.

Again, don't underestimate the value of professional networking. Your network can help you locate job leads, make other connections, gain information about communities and positions, and perhaps help you in the application process.

Finally, for those in midcareer and senior positions, executive search firms (discussed later) are an excellent source of information on career planning, options, and leads. If you make your career plans known to recruiters, they can put you in touch with the right job when it comes up and help you apply for the position.

Your search for vacancies may present you with the first situation in which the **ICMA Code of Ethics** applies to the job-hunting process. As you talk with people in your network, you may hear gossip indicating that someone is about to be terminated and that a job is about to become vacant. Unless the incumbent has resigned or been officially notified of an impending termination, you should not apply for the position.

DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

Many jobs aren't listed on job boards, and more and more employers and recruiters look for applicants on LinkedIn or other online sites. Once you've identified positions for which you want to apply, your next job is to learn more about them so you can craft a résumé and cover letter tailored for each. Homework includes studying and securing background information on the position, the organization, and the community. The information you'll need and the extent of research you'll do will depend on the type of position you want, but the more you learn, the better off you'll be when you apply.

The effort you put into this homework will benefit you in two ways. First, it will help you determine your "fit" with the organization and community; second, your knowledge of and familiarity with the organization you hope to join will prove that you're a serious candidate during your interview. Realize that if you don't take the time to prepare and other candidates do, it will show.

Job hunting and the ICMA Code of Ethics

The **ICMA Code of Ethics** provides guidelines for members at every stage of the job-hunting process. The full code is available on the ICMA website. Take particular note of the following guidelines:

Seeking employment Members should not seek employment for a position that has an incumbent who has not announced his or her separation or been officially informed by the appointive entity that his or her services are to be terminated. Members should not initiate contact with representatives of the appointive entity. Members contacted by representatives of the appointive entity body regarding prospective interest in the position should decline to have a conversation until the incumbent's separation from employment is publicly known.

Professional respect Members seeking a position should show professional respect for persons formerly holding the position, successors holding the position, or for others who might be applying for the same position. Professional respect does not preclude honest differences of opinion; it does preclude attacking a person's motives or integrity.

Credentials A member's résumé for employment . . . shall completely and accurately reflect the member's education, work experience, and personal history. Omissions and inaccuracies must be avoided.

Appointment commitment Members who accept an appointment to a position should report to that position. This does not preclude the possibility of a member considering several offers or seeking several positions at the same time. However, once a member has accepted a formal offer of employment, that commitment is considered binding unless the employer makes fundamental changes in the negotiated terms of employment.

Length of service For chief administrative/executive officers appointed by a governing body or elected official, a minimum of two years is considered necessary to render a professional service to the local government. In limited circumstances, it may be in the best interests of the local government and the member to separate before serving two years. Some examples include refusal of the appointing authority to honor commitments concerning conditions of employment, a vote of no confidence in the member, or significant personal issues. It is the responsibility of an applicant for a position to understand conditions of employment, including expectations of service. Not understanding the terms of employment prior to accepting does not justify premature separation. For all members a short tenure should be the exception rather than a recurring experience, and members are expected to honor all conditions of employment with the organization.

In years past, applicants doing their homework relied on information received directly from the potential employer, supplemented by hours visiting the local library and researching public documents. Today, the Internet provides information at an applicant's fingertips. Here are tips for doing your homework:

- Get general information about the city or county: demographics, form of government, economic base, employment statistics, cost of living, local and state taxes.
- Visit the municipal website and familiarize yourself with the municipality and its leadership, governing body agendas and minutes, organizational chart and budget, strategic plan, capital improvement program, and other documents. If available, view videos of governing body meetings.
- Visit the website of the local news outlet(s) to develop an overall picture of the community. Be sure to read the news stories published immediately prior to

Salary history bans

Salary history bans are legal measures or policies that prohibit employers from requiring job applicants to report their current and previous salaries. Such bans are intended to narrow compensation gaps based on gender and race. They preclude past disparities from influencing compensation setting for current positions. Several states have salary history bans, including California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, and Washington. New York City and the city and county of San Francisco have passed jurisdiction-specific similar laws. In some salary history bans, employers may seek compensation data only after a conditional employment offer is made.

As an applicant, your research should include understanding whether a prospective employer is free to inquire about current or prior salaries. If you're a job applicant in a jurisdiction with a salary history ban, you have the right to withhold your salary information. Voluntary disclosure of salary history prior to a job offer generally frees the prospective employer to consider disclosed information. After you understand the scope of the job and have established mutual interest with the prospective employer, a useful strategy is to state your salary requirements or expectations.

the job vacancy to understand why the job is vacant and what caused the former officeholder to leave, as well as the stories published just before the last election for insight into the issues and the makeup of the governing body.

- If it's realistic to visit the community, walk around, stop in at local shops and restaurants, and visit the chamber of commerce. Familiarize yourself with the general history of the area and brush up on current events and significant projects.

- If you can't visit, "tour" the city or county on Google Maps; search YouTube for videos that provide a sense of the community.
- Refer to the [Directory of ICMA-Recognized Local Governments](#). These cities and counties have been identified as providing a legal framework conducive to the practice of professional management.
- Find out whether the state or jurisdiction has open records laws that would require public disclosure about applicants and/or candidates for positions.
- Find out whether the state or the local jurisdiction has a salary history ban that prohibits employers from requiring job applicants to report their current and past salaries. The purpose of such a ban is to narrow compensation gaps based on gender and/or race by precluding past disparities from influencing compensation for current positions.
- Tap your personal network for colleagues from nearby communities or the same state and see what you can learn from them. People in your professional associations who are familiar with the community and the position can provide helpful advice and information: even if you don't know them personally, don't hesitate to contact them to get their perspectives.

Visit the website of the local news outlet(s) to develop an overall picture of the community. Be sure to read the news stories published immediately prior to the job vacancy to understand why the job is vacant and what caused the former officeholder to leave, as well as the stories published just before the last election for insight into the issues and the makeup of the governing body.

As you do your homework, you'll begin to develop a profile of your personal preferences and zero in on the region or type of community you'd like to work in. It's best to do this early in the process so it can guide your search,

YOUR RÉSUMÉ

“You have ten seconds to make an impression.” While polishing up your résumé and preparing the accompanying cover letter may be your first step in responding to a job opportunity, it’s not the first step in the recruitment process. That first step has already been taken by the organization offering employment. As a result, the advertisement to which you’re responding has been carefully and subtly crafted to yield a pool of candidates who not only qualify for the position but also fit the organization and its needs.

Your résumé and cover letter are your primary written vehicles for showcasing yourself. If you don’t have a current résumé, you should prepare one before you want to apply for a job. A résumé should not be prepared in haste, and it’s a good idea to ask a mentor or other experienced person to review it with you. If you have regular performance reviews in your current position, that’s a good time to update it with your accomplishments.

Your résumé permits the employer to compare you with other applicants. It is also your opportunity to make your first impression. When you’re an applicant, the résumé and cover letter are the only elements in the recruitment process entirely within your control. The people who review your application can be just as influenced by the appearance and organization of your résumé and cover letter as they are by your actual experience.

What should a résumé do?

Your résumé should help you stand out from the competition and be invited for an interview. The first hurdle, of course, is to demonstrate that you’re qualified for the job. If your résumé shows that you meet the minimum requirements, it will go into the stack reserved for qualified applicants. If it doesn’t, it will go in the “reject” stack. A subsequent screening of the résumés will result in a smaller group of candidates for further review and consideration and, ultimately, a preliminary interview.

Don’t expect anyone reading your résumé to do your work for you and to read between the lines. The résumé must

- Communicate your qualifications, experience, and personality.

- Highlight your accomplishments.
- Demonstrate that you’re organized and conduct your affairs in a businesslike fashion.
- Send positive messages about your skills and abilities.
- Illustrate that you’re current and innovative in your professional field.
- Demonstrate your “fit” with the employing organization.

Your résumé should suggest whether your experience has been broad or narrow and whether your efforts have resulted in significant accomplishments. It should provide clues about your management and supervisory capabilities, and it should indicate that you are career oriented and stable. Finally, it should provide insights into your career growth, professional achievements and skills, and personal management style.

Who will review my résumé?

Depending on the situation, résumés may be read and screened by either a professional or a layperson. Possible reviewers include personnel specialists, selection committees, local government administrators or department heads, elected officials, and executive recruiters. Based on the reviewer’s background, perceptions of the position, educational history, and other variables, each reviewer draws conclusions as to whether your résumé should be selected for further consideration.

The initial review of a résumé might be done in a matter of seconds, and the decision to give further consideration to a particular applicant will largely depend on the impression and information conveyed by the résumé.

Some hiring organizations use applicant tracking systems to help manage the recruitment and hiring process for onboarding new employees. These are software applications that collect and filter application materials (e.g., letters, resumes, references), screen and track applicants, and manage correspondence. They can assist in finding the right applicants from a pool by using targeted questions, determining eligibility based on data about the applicant, scoring applications through keyword matching, ranking against the

job description or eligibility measures such as years of experience, skills, certifications, or other requirements.

Can I keep my application confidential?

As noted before, when you apply for a position, don't forget that in some places your application materials, including résumé, cover letter, salary history, and references, may be considered public documents. In these cases, especially for high-profile positions such as city manager or county administrator, local media in the jurisdiction to which you're applying may review your application materials and contact your current or past employers. You should make a point of finding out in advance whether your application could become public. If it could, and if you still choose to apply, be prepared to answer questions from the media—and from your current employer.

Appendix C provides detailed guidance on preparing a résumé, plus a sample.

YOUR COVER LETTER

The cover letter tells the reader who you are, indicates your interest in the position, and briefly shows how your professional accomplishments, interests, and skills match the needs of the position. The cover letter is at least as important as the résumé; in many cases, the reviewer will not even read a résumé unless it is accompanied by a cover letter—and in some cases the cover letter can get you an interview when the résumé may not.

A good cover letter will impress the reader not only with your skills and experience, but also with your understanding of the organization and the position, thereby improving your chances of “winning” this first round of the competition. Your goal at this point is to have your résumé considered carefully and to be invited for an interview. Again, you need to make yourself stand out from the crowd and show why you're a top candidate. For this reason, your cover letter should be an original work.

How do I prepare the cover letter?

Like the résumé, your cover letter should be neat and businesslike, give a good first impression, and be tailored to the specific position for which

you're applying and to the community where it's offered. It should direct the reader's attention to the particular skills and accomplishments that make you a strong candidate for the job. Appendix D provides a template for writing a cover letter.

To customize your letter, draw on the position description and the information you gathered about the community in the “homework” phase described earlier.

Address the cover letter to the appropriate person by name, not just by title. If the job advertisement doesn't give the name, call the organization and try to obtain it. The letter should be simple, clear, and no more than one and one-half pages long. Use frequent paragraph breaks for easy reading. Because of the length limitation, you will have to put considerable thought into writing and editing it. The first sentence should attract the attention of the reader by noting the single accomplishment that best illustrates what you have achieved professionally. In the following sentences, list five or six other significant accomplishments that are most relevant to the community to which you are applying. The reader should want to read your résumé. Indicate your enthusiasm for the position.

As noted earlier, many employers now request electronic applications, with the cover letter and résumé attached to an e-mail message or entered online into a hiring portal. However, if the letter and résumé are sent by traditional mail, print the cover letter on plain white or ivory paper or on personal (not business) stationery. Mark the envelope “Confidential.”

Are my résumé and cover letter ready to send?

You will draft and edit your résumé and cover letter numerous times before you end up with a good product. Take no pride in authorship. Have a professional associate or a career adviser give your final draft a critical review. If that person says it looks fine, give it to someone else who can be more critical and who can read it from the viewpoint of a prospective employer.

It goes without saying that your résumé and cover letter must be correct in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. A misplaced word or poor grammar in your application materials is a quick route

to the “reject” stack; in fact, typographical and grammatical errors are the most common reasons for rejection of an applicant’s qualifications.

SELECTING YOUR PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES

No matter how you decide to handle professional references at the initial phase of your job search, select them with thought and care. They should include individuals who are

- Distinguished in your organization, your community, and/or professional circles.
- Knowledgeable about your professional accomplishments and work style.
- Knowledgeable about your personal character.
- Knowledgeable about your career objectives and why you have applied for the position.
- Willing and available to give a reference and articulate in doing so.
- Willing and able to maintain confidentiality.

Who should I ask to serve as a reference?

Ideally, your references should be individuals who can comment on your skills, your effectiveness in dealing with people, your personal qualities, and, if you’re an experienced manager, your community standing, your professional reputation, and your financial management abilities. More specifically, you want your references to be professionals with high integrity who are advocates for your strengths and abilities while providing candid and honest feedback. It’s not likely that every reference will be able to meet all of these criteria, but in combination they should be able to provide a fairly comprehensive assessment.

Take care not to provide references with whom you have not communicated in recent years. In addition, do not provide personal references (relatives, neighbors, clergy, etc.) unless specifically asked to do so. And don’t be tempted to “name drop.”

Be sure to ask individuals’ permission to list them as references. If you don’t, they’ll be caught unaware when contacted. Explain to your references your interest in the job, your future

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goals, and any new accomplishments of which they may not be aware. Provide them with a copy of your résumé and the description of the position you’re applying for to make it easier for them to respond to questions from a prospective employer. Your references should be willing to comment on both your positive attributes and any possible weaknesses. Make it clear that you want them to give honest opinions.

Just as you tailored your résumé to fit each specific position, you must carefully select your references for each application. For example, if you currently work in general administration and are seeking a position as a human resource (HR) director, try to identify an HR professional who has worked with you and who can speak to your proficiency in that area. It may be appropriate to include a former subordinate if your new job will be a supervisory position.

Rotate your references, especially if you’re applying for several positions during a short period of time. This is important not only because you should select references based on the skills you want to spotlight for each position but also because it’s common courtesy to value your references’ time and not have two or three people contacted by every potential employer.

As you think about the best references, consider also when you will notify your current employer that you’re seeking another position. From a tactical perspective, it’s best if your employer hears the news from you rather than from an elected official, staff member, or reporter! Depending on the level of confidentiality you hope to maintain, you may not want to list references from your current place of employment yet. If this is the case, be specific, asking the prospective employer to refrain from contacting your current employer at this point in the process.

Your references will change depending on your career status. Following are suggestions for professionals at different stages of their careers.

Recent graduates If you're a recent graduate and have little or no work experience in the field, don't overlook the many people who can comment on your work ethic, communication skills, technical abilities, and professional goals. Consider current or former professors, faculty advisers, leaders from community or volunteer organizations, and even peers. Whether you worked at a fast-food restaurant or a chemistry lab, former supervisors from any field can provide potential employers with insight into your abilities.

Emerging leaders, new professionals, non-CAOs If you're a department head or assistant, use your boss as a reference if you can. If you're doing a good job, this should not be a problem. If for some reason you can't or don't want to use your boss, seek the assistance of another local government executive. Someone in your field should always be named as a reference to comment on your professional attributes. Colleagues, department heads, professionals in other communities who may have worked with you on projects, and business leaders or other professionals who have worked with you in the community can also be good sources.

Experienced executives If you're a chief administrator applying for another CAO position, you can be sure that the prospective employer will want to discuss your performance with a member of your current governing body. Rarely will a governing body hire a new administrator without talking to the current employer. While this is often uncomfortable, the best thing you can do is to be prepared for it. As noted above, it's best to disclose your candidacy for a position to your governing body (at a minimum to the mayor or chair) before its members hear the news from another source. It's also acceptable to ask the mayor, chair, or another governing body member who supports your desire for career advancement to serve as a reference.

Career changers If you're a career manager from another field seeking to move into local government, provide the typical references from former supervisors, boards of directors, and

colleagues. If you have experience working with cities or counties or the broader public, include references who can spotlight your work in those areas.

Managers "in transition" If you're a manager "in transition" who has resigned under pressure or been fired, offer to provide references who can verify your explanation of events leading to your resignation or termination. These references may be separate and distinct from your position-specific references.

What information should I provide about my references?

Whether you provide reference information with your résumé or later in the recruitment process, key information should include the person's name, position, employer (if relevant), e-mail address, and telephone number(s). Verify contact information to ensure that it's correct. In addition, provide a description or explanation of your relationship to the reference: boss, colleague, peer, governing body member, community representative, subordinate. Do not make it difficult for the prospective employer to contact your references.

Maintaining your references

A critical part of developing a good reference is maintaining one. Provide updates to your references regularly on how your search is progressing. When you're contacted by prospective employers or invited for interviews, let your references know. A good reference will be interested in your progress. Remember that many of your references are active in the field and can provide job leads and encouragement during your search.

Don't forget to thank your references promptly and frequently. When you finally land that position you've been trying for, let them know so they can share the celebration. A good reference can make all the difference in the final selection.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

Social media has become an integral tool in our everyday personal and professional lives. Inevitably, it also plays a role in the job hunting and employment processes.

Social media sites allow employers to get a glimpse of who you are outside the confines of a résumé, cover letter, or interview. These sites also offer job seekers the opportunity to learn about entities they're interested in, connect with current and former employees, and hear about job openings instantaneously.

Professional recruiting firms turn to social media networks to promote management-level recruitment opportunities, introduce themselves to employers and potential applicants, and highlight successful placements.

In the public eye

Many employers use social networks to screen potential job candidates: they will browse your social media profiles to evaluate your character and personality. Employers often use social networks to see if candidates

- Present themselves professionally.
- Are a good fit for the organization's culture.
- Are well-rounded and have a range of interests.

Some employers even base their hiring decisions on what they find. Applicants have been removed from a candidate pool because their profiles contained provocative or inappropriate photos or information; evidence of drinking and/or drug use; examples of poor communication skills; negative comments about previous/current employers; discriminatory or political comments; or lies about qualifications.

Think of your social media profiles as extensions of your résumé! You can be certain that recruiters and/or prospective employers will conduct an online search for your name when considering you for a position. Before you apply, do that search yourself—and do it often. If you find anything that might put you in a negative or questionable light, do some “cleaning.” If you don't already have a LinkedIn profile, try creating one and becoming active on the network. That will help push your profile to the top of the search results.

Make sure that what's out there is something you'd be comfortable talking about in a job interview. And if you're one of the relatively rare individuals who do not post on (or have stopped

using) social media, be prepared to explain your reason(s) during an interview.

Social connections are also important in considering your online presence. The interactions (posts, comments, and pictures) by friends and family on your social pages may be seen by potential employers.

Here are some tips for keeping your online “résumé” professional:

- As you embark on a job search, review your social media pages and if necessary do some cleanup of photos and posts. Even when you delete or hide something, everything you put on social media lives forever throughs sharing, forwarding, screenshots, or archiving. Still, a cleanup is a good idea.
- If you put something online, consider it public and permanent. Before posting anything—whether on your account or someone else's—ask yourself if it abides by the [ICMA Code of Ethics](#) and think how it could look to a potential employer. Social media is often a forum for conversation about political and social issues, and as a public administrator, it's important for you to maintain a perception of neutrality.
- If you have a LinkedIn profile, ensure that it is consistent with what appears on your résumé.
- Consider everyone a reporter. Thanks to cell phones, everyone now carries a camera and microphone. Public service means you're in the public eye, no matter where you are. Photos or videos can be uploaded to social media sites within seconds and become a permanent record, and can gain traction through sharing.
- Don't let your friends tarnish your social media brand by “tagging.” In addition to politely asking them not to tag you in potentially negative photos, you can adjust your settings so that anyone who tags you in a picture needs your approval first.
- Be aware of who you “friend,” follow, or connect with. If someone is likely to post inappropriate content on your page—or if their connection with you could negatively affect your reputation—it's best to avoid

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them. Before you ask someone to connect, consider what you have in common. That common denominator is what's going to help with (or hinder) your job search.

- Be careful using personal social media accounts during work hours, as this may cause concern for some employers.

Best foot forward

Social media can be a great opportunity to create a personal brand online. Here are some tips on

putting your best foot forward:

- Research different social media platforms; the landscape changes frequently.
- Use the same professional picture, username, and bio for your accounts to create a unified message.
- Keep your profiles up to date and ensure that they are well written and free of typos and that any facts you include are correct.
- Create a personal overview that covers your previous experience and current career goals. When creating a [LinkedIn](#) account, for example, write a strong summary that includes keywords and phrases that your potential employers would look for so that they can find you online.
- Social media is supposed to be social, so interact! Joining online conversations helps you keep up to date on issues, meet helpful contacts, and showcase your expertise in your field.

Manage your online reputation

Although reputation management is important throughout your career, it's likely to take on particular importance during a transition. Reputation management involves active efforts to influence what and how people think of you based on your online presence. The first step is to realize that it starts long before you apply for a job. You should always be thoughtful and mindful about what you post on social media, what others post about you, and who can see your posts. Think before you comment. Even offhand remarks can later be questioned by potential employers.

In terms of your personal reputation, you control your own actions, but you don't control the actions of others, and negative communications that can harm your reputation can occur at any time. But there's good news. Here are some active steps you can take to maintain a *positive online reputation*:

- Assess your current online presence. See what comes up when you search for yourself online. Are the search results mostly positive or negative? Keep a careful watch on what others are saying about you online.
- Create positive content on the communication channels you can control (your website, blog, social media pages). For example, you might create a blog post describing one of your volunteer activities. If something negative about you appears online, it will mainly reside on the servers of search engines. New, positive content helps "bury" anything negative.
- Ask colleagues and others you have worked with to post recommendations on your LinkedIn page.
- Consider engaging the services of a reputation management professional. (ICMA subsidizes [reputation management services](#) for members who are in transition.)

- Ask your references to “recommend” you on your LinkedIn account.
- If you’re between jobs, don’t refer to yourself online as “unemployed” or “job seeker.” Instead, identify who you are professionally in terms of the type of position you’re looking for.
- Include your social media handles, URLs, etc., on your résumé.
- Start following cities, counties, and other organizations that you’re interested in working for someday. The more you know about these organizations now, the more prepared you’ll be when the time comes to apply. If you “like” a page, you’ll occasionally see content from that page. If you “favorite” the page, you’ll see new content from those pages at the top of your news feed.

WORKING WITH EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRMS

More and more employers and job seekers for senior management positions are using the services of an executive search consultant to assist in the recruitment for city/county positions. Executive search consultants are personnel experts who are retained by the employer to actively recruit and screen qualified applicants for a position. They can be a valuable resource, particularly if they follow certain professional practices and procedures and understand the importance of the [ICMA Code of Ethics](#).

A search firm may offer its services nationwide, or it may focus on a particular geographic region and/or industry specialty. Each firm offers different services and different approaches to recruitments. It’s important for candidates to research and understand these differences in order to effectively compete for positions.

ICMA maintains a [Directory of Executive Search Firms](#) that is available to ICMA members and available on request to communities seeking assistance with their search (contact advertising@icma.org). ICMA also publishes [Recruitment Guidelines](#) for governing bodies that are recruiting a new manager. Local governments sometimes ask [ICMA Senior Advisors](#) to help

select an executive search firm or assist with recruitment in other ways.

Why do local governments use executive recruiters?

Although executive searches can be performed by in-house HR departments, many local governments find that employing an executive search firm is more expedient, efficient, and effective, especially when they need to fill an important position on the management team. Executive recruiters can offer confidentiality, a network of contacts, objectivity in evaluating candidates, and experience in negotiating terms of employment.

Many governing body members have never been involved in recruiting for senior public management positions, so executive search firms provide some needed expertise that often helps create a more professional and timely recruitment process.

In deciding whether to use an executive search firm, the employer normally weighs the cost of using a firm against the cost of preparing and executing an advertisement/recruitment campaign, screening and qualifying candidates, and operating without a key employee for an extended length of time. Often they conclude that the cost is a good investment, particularly when considering the importance of filling key management positions with highly qualified individuals as soon as is practical.

What is the role of an executive recruiter?

Executive recruitment firms are retained by, and work on behalf of, employers. While most local government recruiters maintain collaborative working relationships with candidates, their client is the local government, and they represent their client in all aspects of the search process.

That said, establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with recruiters can benefit you by providing a sounding board for career guidance, assistance in résumé preparation, constructive feedback on interview skills, and an assessment of your strengths and experience gaps. In maintaining this relationship, it’s critical to deal with the recruitment firm in an open and honest

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manner at all times. Don't present any surprises or misinformation that could cause long-term damage to this working relationship.

How does the executive search process work?

Once the employer has selected a firm, the firm manages the next steps in partnership with the client:

- Evaluation of the position and the employer's need
- Creation of a job profile for the position
- Outreach through advertising, direct marketing, and networking
- Candidate screening and evaluation
- Preliminary interviews
- Reference and background checks
- "Short list" recommendations to the employer
- Finalist interviews
- Selection and negotiations.

The search firm works with the local government to arrive at an understanding of the organization and its culture, the community, and specifics of the position to be filled. The purpose is to identify the major goals and issues of the organization and community and to develop a consensus profile of the "ideal" candidate for the position. This profile includes academic credentials, professional qualifications, job experience, personality, and leadership and management style. It should also include a history of the position, including the tenure of the previous manager and the reason for the current vacancy. The profile is then used to market the position to prospective candidates.

To recruit candidates, the firm places advertisements in appropriate professional communication vehicles and websites. It then engages in research and networking—contacting existing sources, pursuing leads, contacting prospective candidates, and beginning to screen the most promising ones. The firm personally interviews the leading candidates and conducts reference and background checks. Many times the firm uses an extensive questionnaire to narrow the pool of candidates.

The search firm generally provides the employer with a list of all applicants for the position as well as a "short list" of recommended candidates for further consideration. It's important to recognize that many applicants are eliminated from continued consideration, not because they are unqualified but because they may not fit the recruitment profile or because other candidates have better credentials.

The employer then selects finalists, and the recruiter arranges for interviews. The recruiter also serves as a resource for the finalists, providing additional information as they further consider the opportunity and giving feedback on their personal and professional credentials, résumé, interview skills, and experience gaps. During this communication, it's important for applicants to keep the recruiter updated about any changes in their current jobs and interest in the new positions.

Once a preferred candidate is selected through the interview process, typically the recruiter works with the employer and the candidate to negotiate an agreement and compensation package. The recruiter usually assumes an intermediary role, providing information about salary and benefits practices in other communities, and serving as a conduit for the exchange of information to reach consensus. Once a final agreement is approved by both the governing body and the selected candidate, the recruiter can assist in coordinating the announcement of the new hire.

Typically, the search firm stays in touch after the new hire comes on board to help smooth the transition and ensure that the employer is satisfied. Most search firms guarantee their placements for a period of one or more years and

will conduct another recruitment if the person they placed leaves for any reason or is terminated for cause.

Finally, search firms protect the candidate's confidentiality within the limits of local and state statutes and guidelines, and they subscribe to a policy of open recruitment and announcements. The search firm should advise the candidate of the confidentiality requirements that apply to each recruitment.

How to work with an executive recruiter

For years, many job candidates regarded executive recruiters as intimidating and unapproachable. The demographics of the executive search industry are changing, however, and recruiters now understand that every client could be a future candidate and every candidate could be a future client.

Today's recruiters are receptive to applicants who contact them about specific openings. Recruiters view such contacts as opportunities to establish an ongoing relationship, and they encourage candidates to keep them updated on their current positions and future plans. While recruiters typically have heavy travel schedules and commitments, many are happy to talk with individuals about specific positions or to simply provide career feedback and counsel.

If you do contact a recruiter, respect the recruiter's time and your own. You'll create a good first impression by being organized; describing yourself and your career objectives in a clear, concise, and objective fashion; honoring all deadlines; and dealing straightforwardly. Be respectful and professional, keeping in mind that your behavior will affect whether the recruiter considers you to be a prospect and later presents you to a client as a candidate.

Whether or not you take the initiative, at some point in your career you're likely to receive a call or letter from a recruiter inquiring about your interest in a specific position. If this occurs, you can be sure that the recruiter is doing one or both of the following: (1) sounding you out as a possible candidate if you appear to match the profile for this position and (2) determining whether you might be a source of other potential candidates.

Although you may not be interested in the position, this is a good opportunity to establish a relationship with the recruiter by referring potential candidates and letting the recruiter know your own career objectives and preferences. You're encouraged to discuss goals, objectives, and special projects that you've been working on; geographic locations where you'd like to move; and/or your commuting and family limitations. In brief, don't squander the opportunity to leave a positive impression.

Professional recruiters can be helpful to applicants throughout the recruitment process by providing updates on their status, coordinating travel arrangements, and giving constructive feedback following interviews. It's perfectly acceptable to ask for an update if the recruiter hasn't offered one.

If you do choose to apply for the position, do your homework as described earlier. Start with the position profile, which is an outline of what the employer is looking for, and complete any steps the recruiter asks you take. Recruiters use a variety of instruments and processes to get to the best fit for their clients, and you should be prepared to do your part by completing a questionnaire, for example, or responding to calls and e-mails.

If you accept an invitation to be a finalist for an interview, the recruiter will expect your commitment to continue. But if you've learned something that has made you decide to bow out, do it before scheduling the interview and explain your reason to the recruiter. Candidates who withdraw from a recruitment process after an interview has been accepted or scheduled are seldom actively pursued again by the recruiter.

If you participate in a finalist interview but are not selected, ask the recruiter for feedback. Although it may be difficult for the recruiter to explain an employer's selection—it may have come down to "fit"—accept any feedback you get and learn from it. And remember that if you're not a good fit for the position, you wouldn't have been happy in it.

Although few executive search firms would admit to having a "blacklist," they're not very forgiving when a job seeker takes advantage of

them. Recruiters work hard to build a trusting relationship with candidates, and that relationship is jeopardized when a job seeker lets them down. Two of the most common embarrassments for recruiters occur when (1) the selected candidate declines an offer because he or she was not serious about the job in the first place or the

family refuses to relocate and (2) the selected candidate receives an offer and then uses it to extract a counteroffer from his or her current employer. Needless to say, taking advantage of a local government or a recruiter—or anyone else involved in the search process—is not a wise career move.

THE SELECTION PROCESS

The selection process begins when an employer or an executive recruiter screens résumés and cover letters and identifies likely candidates for the position. This screening can be performed manually or with the assistance of applicant tracking system software, as described earlier.

SCREENING TOOLS

The selection process is further refined by the use of various screening tools, such as a supplemental questionnaire, a series of interviews, and often a background investigation. The candidate will need to prepare for and participate in these—and will also need to maintain a positive relationship with his or her current employer.

Once you submit your résumé, you need to be prepared for surprise and short-notice requests during the screening process. Thus, it's best to conduct most of your research before you apply; then continue it until you are either hired or no longer under consideration. Always assume that you will be successful at each step and prepare for the next one.

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Early reference calls

The prospective employer may want to contact a few references to validate the information you've provided and get a "picture" of your personality and style. As an applicant, you'll need to be prepared with a short list of references you can trust to keep your job search confidential at this point. Again, be aware that reference information

IN THIS CHAPTER

Once you've been selected as a finalist for a position, the selection process is in the hands of your potential future employer—but you can get ready for the stages that follow:

- Anticipate and prepare for a preliminary screening interview, most likely conducted by phone or video conference.
- Be ready to provide a few references, answer written questions, complete a personality/behavioral profile, and respond to other short-notice requests from the executive recruiter or the potential employer.
- Maintain positive, professional relationships with both your current and future employers and communities.
- Prepare for the interview by reviewing what you know about the position and the community, gathering more information, assessing your personal appearance and online presence, and preparing responses to anticipated questions.
- Pull it all together with a professional, confident, upbeat approach as you face the interview panel.

may be considered public record in some places. The employer will understand that this list is limited because you're not yet in the final stages of negotiation and may not want your current employer to be aware of your search.

Screening interviews

The employer may arrange for screening interviews before selecting candidates for full

on-site interviews. These screening interviews have traditionally been conducted by telephone, but as technology allows, potential employers and recruiting firms may use video conferencing to narrow the field of applicants. Some search firms may even choose to meet candidates personally for a “get acquainted” meeting. But whatever the nature of the screening interview, prepare for it as thoroughly as you would for a full interview. Here are tips for putting your best foot forward in a screening interview:

- If the interviewer doesn't offer the information, ask how much time is allotted and how many questions will be asked. The typical screening interview takes an hour or so.
- Clear your calendar and keep a clock close by.
- For a phone interview, arrange to be in a comfortable environment with no interruptions or distractions.
- Also for a phone interview, try to connect with the interviewers by using their names and doing your best to respond to each one personally, since they can't see you.
- For an electronic screening interview, be sure to test the technology in advance to ensure that you have the right connection and your equipment works. Do not wait until the day of the interview to test or practice.
- Again, make sure that you connect with the interviewer(s) as you would for an in-person interview. Maintain eye contact and use names of interviewers whenever possible. While it's difficult to judge how the interviewer is receiving your message when you're not face to face, you may occasionally ask if you've answered the questions satisfactorily or if you need to provide more detail.
- Remember that your dress, facial expressions, demeanor, hand gestures, and energy will be visible, so it's a good idea to practice in front of your computer or device and have someone evaluate your approach.
- Ensure that your video background is neutral, professional, and non-distracting.
- Avoid overly lengthy responses; provide a clear and concise answer followed by a brief

example. If your practice sessions show that your responses are longer than about three minutes each, tighten them up.

- As always, be prompt and courteous.

For an electronic screening interview, be sure to test the technology in advance to ensure that you have the right connection and that your equipment works. Do not wait until the day of the interview to test or practice.

If the screening interview will be face to face, the location may be an office, a hotel lobby or meeting room, a coffee shop, or a restaurant. Allow sufficient time before the interview for unexpected delays, navigation, and parking. Take the most current copy of your résumé and cover letter to the interview. Interview preparation and skills are addressed in a later section.

Written questions

As another screening device, the employer or recruiter may forward a set of written questions and ask you to respond in a limited amount of time. While this may appear to be an evaluation of writing skills, it is far more. The questions are normally designed to evaluate your substantive knowledge and experience in a specific area of concern to the employer. Your earlier homework will enable you to provide relevant responses that relate your knowledge and experience to local concerns. Be aware that written responses may be restricted in length, either by a “not to exceed” limit or by the capabilities of an electronic survey form. Plan your responses so that they are concise. And check carefully for spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Personality/behavioral profile questionnaire

Some employers may ask you to complete a personality or behavioral profile questionnaire. Such an exercise may be beneficial to you, because it can help you better understand yourself, your style, and your strengths and

potential weaknesses in relationship to a position, community, or opportunity. It can also prepare you for questions about your particular style that may come up during the interview.

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On the other hand, human personalities and behaviors are complex, and many of these questionnaires provide a simple description of traits based on a limited number of questions. In addition, no matter what degree of confidentiality is guaranteed, if the results are distributed to a number of people, the risk of public release increases. So before agreeing to complete such a questionnaire, be sure you understand how the information will be used and who will receive a copy of it. Be aware, however, that if you decline to complete the profile, you may be eliminated from further consideration.

Video

Some employers ask candidates to send a video instead of using electronic or video conferencing. They may ask for a recording of you at a public meeting, a recording in which you respond to one or more specific questions, or a recording in which you generally describe yourself.

If you're asked for a video, the quality of the recording is extremely important. If the video shows you responding to specific questions or describing yourself, you should prepare, rehearse, and ask a trusted friend or colleague to provide feedback. Then you'll need to decide whether to use a home video camera or a professional studio to do the recording, as there may be significant differences in quality and in how you appear. If the employer requests a video of you at a public meeting, and if you do not have one available or if the only ones are of poor quality, you will need to "negotiate" a substitute response.

COMMUNITY AND EMPLOYER RELATIONS

As the selection process proceeds, it's critical to maintain a positive professional relationship with both your current and future employers and your current and future communities. The [ICMA Code of Ethics](#) requires members to be committed to "the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity" in order to "merit the trust and respect of the elected and appointed officials, employees, and the public."

As you've learned by now, applicants for positions in the public sector should not have any expectation of confidentiality and privacy. If you've made a clear decision that it's time for you to seek a new position, then it's appropriate to inform your employer—either the chief elected official and governing body or an individual supervisor—of your intent to pursue other opportunities. Moreover, you should do so as soon as possible if you're confident that your employer will be professional about the news and not allow it to adversely affect your relationship or your ability to do your job.

It's critical to maintain the trust and confidence of your current employer, and this relationship will be damaged if your employer learns of your plans from secondary sources or through the media. At a minimum you must ensure that your employer is informed before a potential new employer makes your candidacy public and, at the latest, when you're invited to be interviewed. Even though the interviews may be confidential, the risk that the information will become public increases significantly at that point. If you're in a CAO position, you should first call the mayor or chair of the presiding body in your current community and personally inform him or her. You should also be willing to tell all the members of the governing body what you are doing and why. Prepare a succinct and straightforward answer to the question, "Why are you pursuing other positions?"

Be prepared to talk with the media once it becomes public knowledge that you have interviewed or are a candidate for a position. They will be asking many of the same questions that your current employer may be asking, and some may try to paint your current situation as

controversial. Your message should be the same to the governing body, public, and media.

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THE INTERVIEW PROCESS: BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER

The interview is critical. While good credentials and a great résumé get you the interview, the interview gets you the job! If you're going to stand out from the crowd as the most qualified candidate, you'll need to prepare thoroughly. After all, you'll now be face to face in competition with other professionals whose experience and track records are at least as good as yours. Don't be overconfident. Strong credentials rarely overcome a poor interview.

In a standard interview, you'll be questioned on your work experience, accomplishments, career objectives, alternative approaches to problems faced by local government, and related matters. The interview may be limited to an hour, in which case finalists may be called back for a second interview.

Types of interviews

For executive positions (manager or administrator), the employer may use various processes. You may start, for example, with a community panel including some council or board members and staffers, or you may interview directly with the governing body.

For staff positions (assistant, department head, analyst), your interview is likely to be with a group of managers and employees. Interview panels may include members of the executive management

team as well as representatives of the business or residential community, a neighboring local government administrator, and others. Besides the full group, you may also spend some time individually with one or more members of the interview panel. You may be offered a tour with a staff member, and, if you're a candidate for a senior position, you may be invited to a staff or community reception.

Some employers may use other tools, such as a written assignment, a verbal presentation, or an assessment center. An assessment center involves a variety of "exercises" in group or individual settings, including a verbal résumé, role play, and team problem solving. Assessors observe candidates' behavior and their skills in oral communication, interpersonal interactions, problem solving/decision making, planning/organizing, and leadership.

Preparing for the interview

To prepare yourself for an interview, you should do the following:

- Review available information about the local government.
- Make personal contact with individuals who may have valuable information about the position and community.
- Assess your personal abilities, skills, and professional accomplishments.
- Assess your image and appearance.
- Review what you've learned about how you present yourself online.
- Prepare answers to potential interview questions.

You can find additional tips in [Preparing for an Interview](#) on the ICMA website.

Gathering information By this stage you should have gathered as much information as you can about the community or jurisdiction, the organization, and the current and future issues and challenges. Identify key individuals in the organization and review their backgrounds and their stance on issues.

Personal contacts Contact individuals who are likely to know something about the position and

the jurisdiction. These may include former staff members of the employing organization, local business leaders, the chamber of commerce, and CAOs and other ICMA members in neighboring jurisdictions. In addition, the state association and ICMA Senior Advisors can be excellent sources of information.

Personal assets Thoroughly review your résumé and career goals. Referring to the self-assessment you completed earlier, review your technical competencies and skills, what you do well (and not so well), and where you've succeeded and failed. Be prepared to draw parallels between your background and past experiences and the needs of the employer. Consider your weaknesses as well as your strengths.

Image and appearance It's well known that clothes can affect how others perceive you. Studies have shown that people form an opinion of you in the first 40 seconds, long before you can tell your interviewer how you saved a city from certain bankruptcy. Your message will be muddled if you don't look as solid, secure, and "in charge" as your background implies. You need to look authoritative, confident, and able to get the job done. It may be necessary to take a critical look at your appearance and invest whatever it takes to improve it.

Online presence The section on "Social Media and Your Online Reputation" emphasized the importance of examining your online presence to anticipate what the governing body, staff, and community members know about you before you arrive for the interview. An old news story, a personnel story, a comment made by a current resident or reporter—all will be online, and while you may or may not have been correctly quoted, you most certainly will be asked about the situation. Knowing what interviewers know (or think they know) about you based on what they see online is just another way to make sure that you're prepared for the interview—and for any social events that may accompany the interview process.

Here are some guidelines for the interview:

- A conservative approach is the safest in an interview setting. Though many offices have become more casual, it is still typical to wear a suit or similarly professional attire for an interview, unless specifically told otherwise

by the recruiter or employer contact.

- It is better to be overdressed than underdressed. Taking off a jacket is easy but sitting across from five well-dressed individuals while you're wearing jeans can't be undone.
- If the interview includes a tour, consider wearing comfortable, professionally appearing footwear.
- Bring a portfolio that includes a pad of paper and pen so you can take notes during the interview. Some interviewers will ask multi-part questions, and jotting down key words so you fully answer the question is important. It is also wise to have some notes written down that remind you of what you hope to convey.
- Ensure that your cell phone is turned off or on silent and put away. Do not put it on the table.
- Sit up in the chair and lean forward, ideally with your arms on the table. This illustrates your engagement—nonverbal cues matter! You may think that leaning back in the chair makes you seem relaxed and confident—but it really signals a lack of interest.

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Prepare your responses Prepare answers to possible questions that have arisen through your research. If the interviewing community is focused on infrastructure, economic development, human resources, or another area, know how your experiences may help solve an issue that it may have.

During the interview, listen carefully to the interviewers' questions before you answer. When faced with situational or experience-based questions, it's tempting to answer in a theoretical way. For example, when asked to give an example about your management style, a candidate may

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say, “I am a participatory manager who serves the governing body well and pays real attention to details.” But the question was to “give an example.” Some employers will simply move on and rate you on your reply, but others will redirect you and require you to provide the example they asked for.

Listen carefully to the interviewers’ questions before you answer. When faced with situational or experience-based questions, it’s tempting to answer in a theoretical way. For example, when asked to give an example about your management style, a candidate may say, “I am a participatory manager who serves the governing body well and pays real attention to details.” But the question was to “give an example.”

It’s more difficult than you might think to respond succinctly to such questions as “How would you summarize your professional and personal background?” and “What are your career goals?” Thinking through your responses to potential questions can help you answer them concisely and articulately during an interview. Here are some traditional questions that you should be prepared to answer:

- What have been your most important accomplishments?
- What has been your worst failure?
- How do you relate to and communicate with the public?
- What are your management strengths and weaknesses?

- Why do you want to change jobs?
- What value would you bring to this organization?

However, more and more interviews are including value-based and situational or experience-based questions that require you to answer with specifics in your experience that relate to the question. For example, instead of the traditional question “What are your management strengths and weaknesses?” an interviewer might ask:

- Give us an example in your current position that demonstrates your management style.
- Please describe a time when something in your organization failed as a result of your management and tell us what you learned from that experience.

Note that questions like these require specific examples, not a general or theoretical description of your management approach.

Most questions will cover your past experience and how you would deal with specific problems that the employer is facing. For senior positions, the interview may focus more on your management philosophy and style than on your technical skills, so be prepared to provide examples that illustrate your philosophy.

A list of popular interview questions appears in Appendix E. Set aside focused time to review these questions and provide honest and succinct, yet thorough, responses. Providing a response that includes specific examples from your direct experience is an excellent way to exhibit your knowledge and abilities. Remember, this is your opportunity to “sell” yourself. If you personally led a project to completion, use the word “I.” If you were part of a team project, explain this and use the word “we.” Then explain your personal role.

If you have no direct experience Occasionally you may be asked a question that requires addressing a specific service issue with which you have no experience or direct knowledge. Here’s an approach that may come to your rescue: Briefly acknowledge that you have no direct experience with the subject and then bridge to a similar subject about which you can demonstrate knowledge, experience, and strength: “I have no direct experience with that, but I do have

experience with [a similar subject] where I used my [specific strengths] to [accomplish specific positive results].”

Another strategy is to briefly acknowledge that you have no direct experience with the particular subject and then describe how you approach new issues that emerge and provide an example.

Most important, keep in mind that the interviewers will appreciate an upbeat and positive attitude. Speaking negatively about your current or former employer or colleagues is inappropriate. If you have had a bad experience, practice how you will address it in your interview.

If you're asked an illegal question Sometimes you may be asked an illegal question such as “This job requires long hours—is your family OK with that? Do you have small children at home that will make it hard for you to put in the hours required?”

If that happens, pause for a couple of seconds to see if someone in the room (a recruiter or another panel member) will comment on the illegal nature of the question. If not, an answer along the lines of “I am aware of the time commitments for the position and feel confident I can meet the requirements.” This answer can work well for any question that invokes family or other responsibilities.

If you're asked a question about religion or any other personal matter that is inappropriate, it's fair to suggest that religion (or whatever) is not relevant: “Based on my research on the position, I do not see how religion plays a role in performing the job responsibilities.”

If you're asked if you plan to become pregnant and start a family and in the near future, one approach is to say that any employee who is hired may need time off for pregnancy, unforeseen surgery, or illness and it is impossible to speculate on the future.

Arrive in the community early

If you have not been able to visit the community before your interview, plan to arrive a day in advance and plan your schedule so that you will be rested and engaged at the interview. Tour the community, listen to the people you encounter, and consider how you will fit there. You can learn a great deal by driving through the residential and business districts, looking at the schools, and

perusing recent real estate listings. Information on the value of homes, condition of public facilities, availability of shopping, and location of parks and schools will help you determine if you want to live there. You may also consider unofficially visiting the employer's facilities. If this is not practical, at least drive by the buildings. Most important, if you have a family, this is the appropriate time to involve your spouse/significant other in the process to ensure that this is an acceptable move for all of you.

Staff tour When you're in town for an interview, a tour with staff may be scheduled either in a group or individually. You should regard the tour as a must-attend event and a critical part of the selection process. The tour provides an opportunity for you to gather information, but be aware that the individual(s) giving the tour most likely will be providing feedback on you as well.

Staff or community reception Especially in the case of senior positions, a reception may be scheduled with staff, the council or board, or the community. Your spouse or partner may or may not be included. These receptions are not casual social events; they're critical parts of the selection process and you should approach them the same way you do the formal interview. Find out who will be there, research their backgrounds, and develop a mental picture of the “personal image” you wish to project—professionally and socially. Key words are *approachable*, *interested*, and *professional*. These events provide you with an opportunity to show the attendees that they would enjoy working with you, that you can do the job, and that you are interested in the community. It provides the hosts with an opportunity to see how you'll deal with staff and residents.

Staff and community receptions are not casual social events; they're critical parts of the selection process and you should approach them the same way you do the formal interview. Find out who will be there, research their backgrounds, and develop a mental picture of the “personal image” you wish to project—professionally and socially.

Be aware that in a general public session, some people may have agendas that are not apparent. They may not tell you that they are running for the council in the next election; they may not be completely forthcoming about their backgrounds. You need to be honest with everybody, but steer the conversation to the positives of what you have seen or what you think. With luck, nobody is trying to find a quote or nefarious story about you to use later, but keep any negatives to yourself. And it's best to avoid alcoholic beverages even if others are drinking.

The interview

The big day: the actual interview. A lot of preparation has gotten you to this point, and you should be pleased that you've made it to this stage. However, there's still more to do to ensure that you do your best.

Your demeanor A professional, personable demeanor is essential to a successful interview:

- Arrive fifteen minutes before your appointed time!
- Appear confident and energetic (but controlled); you're not going to get the job if you appear to be uncertain or passive—or desperate.
- Project an image of maturity and intelligence.
- Demonstrate good body control and posture, eye contact, and a firm handshake. Practice your handshake with others ahead of time and ask for an honest assessment.
- Respond to questions directly, concisely, and articulately.
- Emphasize your successes; the single best indicator of future performance is past success. But don't brag or appear overconfident.
- Avoid small talk and trivia.
- Don't try to be too humorous, but don't give the impression that you have no sense of humor, either.
- Avoid offensive language and off-color jokes; even if they win you a laugh, they'll probably lose you the job.

- Be cautious about expressing personal opinions on issues that might be sensitive to others.
- Avoid criticizing your current employer or others; such behavior reflects a lack of loyalty and judgment on your part.
- Don't be uncomfortable with pauses; let the interviewers take the lead.
- Be sure to give credit where credit is due. Few managers have been successful single-handedly.
- Don't bluff or cover up.
- Send a thank-you email or handwritten card as soon as possible. This "thank-you message" also allows you to insert any piece of information you forgot to mention in the interview.

You're being interviewed because your performance record indicates that you have the skills and talents the employer needs, and you should project this during the interview. Remember that each situation is unique, and the importance of conveying who you are as a person as well as who you would be in the job cannot be overemphasized.

Your message During the interview, your goal is to convince the interviewers that you can do the job. Whether you're a recent graduate or a more experienced candidate, you want to convey a message that you

- Know the responsibilities of the position, are technically competent, and can do the job.
- Are open, honest, and self-confident.
- Are a self-starter and a problem solver.
- Can work effectively with others.
- Will be loyal and responsive to your employer.
- Will be successful if hired.
- Will bring value to the organization.
- Are interested in the community and the profession.

For senior manager/administrator positions, you also want to show that you have the ability to

- Provide administrative leadership.

- Work effectively with the council or board and staff.
- Communicate and work effectively with residents and advisory groups.
- Understand and solve problems.

Finally, be yourself. Portraying yourself as something or someone who you are not can only backfire. Even if no one on the interview team senses the inconsistency now (and someone usually will), you'll eventually revert to your true self. Both you and your employer will be unhappy when they discover that they didn't get what they expected.

What questions should I ask and when? Often the initial interview does not allow much time, if any, for questions that you may have, and you'll need to save your questions for possible follow-up sessions. Asking questions shows that you're interested; it gives you an opportunity to demonstrate what you know about the job and the community; and it puts the follow-up interview on a more equal footing. You should prepare a list of questions based on your pre-interview research. Concentrate on the major concerns that will affect your decision to either accept or reject the job; asking too many questions is unlikely to impress the interviewers and may have the opposite effect. *Do not use this opportunity to ask how you did in the interview!* Finally, don't ask about compensation until a mutual interest has been established. Long before the interview you should have determined (either with the recruiter or through your own research) that you're at least in the right "ballpark" as far as salary is concerned.

How do I conclude an interview? At the conclusion of the interview, thank the interviewers for considering you and, if you want the job, let your interviewers know that you want the job and that you're prepared to do what it takes to be

successful. You may also wish the employer the very best in the event that you're not selected. Follow-up notes to interviewers are acceptable and appreciated as long as they are sent immediately.

What if individual elected officials contact me?

Occasionally during the selection process, an individual elected official or interview panel member may approach you with questions. You should politely decline to respond and indicate that you need to work through a single point of contact at this stage. Notify the hiring authority or recruiter and attempt to clarify the appropriate communication channel.

Withdrawing from a selection process

As you proceed through a selection process, you may decide to withdraw for one or more reasons. If you decide to withdraw after you have submitted an application, but before you have been invited to an interview, you may do so with a formal written communication. If you have had personal contact with an executive recruiter or an official of the other government, it is also polite to call and let that person know you're withdrawing.

If you decide to withdraw after your candidacy has become public, you need to do so in a way that extends professional courtesy to the potential employer and maintains the confidence of your current employer. You should personally contact the appointing/selection authority and provide a direct explanation of why you have elected to withdraw. If you're working with an executive recruiter, it's appropriate to consult the recruiter about how to communicate the withdrawal. Simultaneously, you need to inform your current employer and staff in order to maintain these relationships. In all instances, you should be prepared with a direct answer to why you have withdrawn.

THE REMAINDER OF THE PROCESS

After the selection process is complete, you'll be faced with one of two possible outcomes: You will be offered the job—or not.

IF YOU'RE NOT OFFERED THE JOB

You thought you had a great interview, you did your research on the community, you looked at potential housing and schools, you were ready for a change and yet . . . you were not selected. What do you do now?

Not getting a job offer, particularly one that you really wanted, can be a major disappointment and, depending on your current employment status, can be much more than that. So how can you learn from the experience and prepare for the next round? Here are some suggestions:

- Take time to thank the prospective employer for the opportunity to interview. It will demonstrate your professionalism.
- Consider asking for constructive feedback from the executive recruiter. (You might attempt to get feedback from the interviewer(s), but that may not be realistic.) Could you have done something differently? Did the interviewer(s) have concerns? Were they looking for more experience in a technical area? Did they want an advanced degree? It may be awkward to ask, but the information will be helpful to you in your next interview.
- If you do contact an interviewer, be graceful if the person declines to provide feedback. Perhaps the hiring decision was based on a “gut instinct” or an assessment of “fit” that is difficult to explain. Challenging the interviewer accomplishes nothing except reinforcing the decision not to hire you. Accept the decision and learn from the experience.
- As soon as you leave the interview, write down every interview question that you can

IN THIS CHAPTER

After the selection process is complete, you'll either be offered the job or not, and you need to be prepared for either:

- If you're not offered the job, your next steps are to maintain a professional relationship with both your current employer and the prospective employer that selected someone else.
- If you are offered the job, you need to
 - Make sure this is really the right job for you.
 - Cooperate in background investigations and reference checks.
 - Prepare for media interest.
 - Negotiate compensation and benefits, and formalize the outcome of the negotiations with a written agreement.
 - Formally resign from your current position and develop a transition plan that provides management/performance continuity for your employer.
 - Set priorities for your first few months in your new job.

remember, think through how you answered it, and consider whether a more robust answer could have helped you get the job. If you received any constructive criticism about your responses, revise them.

- Take another look at your résumé and cover letter and determine whether you could improve them. Consider asking an executive recruiter or colleague to review your résumé, even if you did this before.

- Be prepared to address concerns on the part of your current employer. If you plan to continue searching for other employment, be prepared to answer questions about this plan appropriately. Assure those you work with that you will continue to provide excellent service to your current community. Emphasize your professionalism in this respect.

Evaluate your short- and long-term career goals and develop a plan to move forward with them. Don't let one negative experience color your next experience. Do your research again, prepare, and enthusiastically approach the next opportunity. As novelist A. J. Cronin once said, "But always, if we have faith, a door will open for us, not perhaps one that we ourselves would ever have thought of, but one that will ultimately prove good for us."

IF YOU ARE OFFERED THE JOB

In the happy event that you're offered the job, you'll need to negotiate your total compensation package, plan a smooth transition from your current position, and prepare for the "first 100 days" in your new position.

If you're actively pursuing other positions, heed the requirements of the ICMA Code of Ethics. The guideline on Appointment Commitment under Tenet 3 spells out your ethical obligation:

“Appointment Commitment. Members who accept an appointment to a position should report to that position. This does not preclude the possibility of a member considering several offers or seeking several positions at the same time. However, once a member has accepted a formal offer of employment, that commitment is considered binding unless the employer makes fundamental changes in the negotiated terms of employment.”

If you're competing for the position as a CAO, you need to be clear about your intentions and follow through with your actions. Again, you can compete for multiple positions. However, you will always be best served by clearly stating your intentions to prospective employers.

When a local government selects you as the candidate they wish to hire and you truly want the position, the best response is that you will take the position contingent upon reaching agreement on terms and conditions. Once you start down the path of negotiations, your goal should be to get to agreement. Do not enter into negotiations if you really don't want the position.

If two local governments are vying for your services or if one local government is interested in you but a future prospect looks good, be forthcoming with all parties. You may have to defer action on one of the expressions of interest. Or decide to withdraw from a potential offer on the table to pursue other opportunities. Perhaps one of the local governments may decide you are no longer their first choice. Those are realities you will need to address. What you don't want to do is start negotiations with one local government and have them learn later that you continued to interview with other organizations. That will call into question your integrity.

Once the two parties come to agreement on terms and you accept the offer, verbally or in writing, you are bound by your word unless the governing body fails to approve the agreement as negotiated. After all, it takes the two parties, agreeing in principle on the terms of the offer, to advance it to the governing bodies' agenda for formal action.

Is this the right job?

In the event that you're interviewing for multiple positions and the first offer is not your first choice, think carefully before accepting. But be prepared to give an answer as soon as possible (see the later section on negotiating for more detail). If you take a position that isn't your first choice, you need to be able to live with the decision. For a CAO, a minimum of two years is considered necessary to render a professional service to the local government under the Code. For an individual in any position, a short tenure should be the exception rather than a recurring experience, and members are expected to honor all conditions of employment with the organization.

It is *your* responsibility to conduct due diligence to make sure that the position is a good personal and

professional fit. Inadequately evaluating whether you and your family will thrive in the community's educational, social, employment, and climate conditions; assessing whether you're capable of meeting the organization's challenges; or determining the political culture of the community are not justification for leaving a position early.

If you're offered the job after the first interview, you may consider asking for a follow-up interview. During the initial interview, the employer asked most of the questions and determined who the organization wanted. Now it's your turn. The follow-up interview is your opportunity to make a final determination of whether the position and the community meet your professional and personal needs and area good fit for you and your family.

If you're applying for a CAO position, every member of the council or board should be at the follow-up interview. This interview is where you're going to get a group consensus on many of the important matters that will affect you. It also allows you to deal on a firsthand basis with any objections or concerns that might surface. Here are questions you might consider:

- Are your responsibilities defined clearly, and are they outlined in the charter or another document?
- Do you feel that you're up to the challenge, or are you concerned that you would be in over your head?
- Are there any unresolved issues in the community from the prior administration that need immediate attention/action?
- Will you be given an opportunity to continue your professional development and to participate in training programs?

Reference checks and background investigations

Reference checks and background investigations are part of almost all recruitment processes. The higher the level of responsibility or security, the deeper and more lengthy the investigation.

Reference checks Although the prospective employer may have made some inquiries earlier, by this point he or she will certainly check your references and want to talk to your current

employer or supervisor—whether that's a council or board or a single individual—as well as to specific coworkers, subordinates, or community members. Alert your references at the appropriate time and ensure that they understand the position for which you're applying and why you're interested in a career change.

If you believe that some of these required references might be negative, you should alert the prospective employer and explain the reason. If you do not wish a specific individual to be contacted, you should request this and explain why. The information obtained from references is generally confidential and will not be shared with you, but that is not true for all states or localities.

Background investigations There's a fine line between an extensive reference check and a full background investigation. In addition to the information gathered from references, the background investigation will normally include credit, education, employment, and criminal record verification and a review of social media sites. Don't be surprised if you're asked to sign a release permitting an investigation and providing access to your social media sites. Again, remember that all your public social media posts are available to everyone, and you can have no expectation of privacy. And again, make sure the information about your employment history and qualifications on LinkedIn or other sites matches what you submitted on your résumé.

Finally, the prospective employer may send a professional investigator to visit your community and verify information through personal contacts and interviews with selected employers or residents. If this is going to occur, you should be notified in advance, and you should ask for the name and qualifications of the individual conducting the site visit. Normally, these visits cannot be kept confidential, and you need to be prepared accordingly.

If the investigation reveals any discrepancies with the information you have provided, you should have an opportunity to address them.

For some positions, the employing organization may require a physical exam or even a drug test, but these are not generally a part of the selection process.

Media relations

If you're applying for a position as chief executive or CAO of a community, you can expect media interest. Open records laws may have permitted or required lists of applicants or finalists to be published before the process is complete, but at some point the names of the candidates will be made public, and the media may contact you directly with questions. They may also ask other individuals and/or your current employer for information about you, and they may cover some of the interviews if those interviews are conducted in public.

Screen incoming calls To avoid surprise calls from the media, it's a good idea to screen calls from the area code of your prospective employer or from unknown numbers (many people now use mobile phones, so it's not clear where the caller is located). Before taking a call that may be from a media representative, you should verify what information is public.

Find out what information is public For example, a reporter may tell you he or she understands that you're an applicant for a certain position and you have not yet been informed that the names are public. Check it out either with the future employer or with the executive search firm. You don't want to be quoted in print with something the media doesn't already know.

Confirm what you should share with the media Once you're informed that candidates' names will be made public, you may wish to talk briefly with the employer or the recruitment firm about how you should interact with the media and what comments you should share. However, in all your dealings with the media, take a professional approach and ensure that the information is accurate and truthful. Provide straightforward answers to questions while at the same time ensuring that you are treating both your potential and your current employers with professional courtesy and respect.

Read all online comments and posts Some media outlets allow public comments to their articles, and your candidacy may attract comments. It may be a good idea to review those online comments and posts, but it is not recommended that you respond or reply to them.

Prepare answers to anticipated media questions

During the interview process, the governing body or members of the media may ask you to comment on what improvements you would make in the organization or community if offered the position. It's a perfectly reasonable question that requires a thoughtful, forthright response. Your response should focus on the talents and skills you bring to the table without being critical of others. The guideline on Professional Respect in Tenet 3 of the [ICMA Code of Ethics](#) reminds members seeking a position to show professional respect for persons formerly holding the position, successors holding the position, or for others who might be applying for the same position. Professional respect does not preclude honest differences of opinion; it does preclude attacking a person's motives or integrity. As one seasoned city manager has advised, "Don't jump the gun or dance on the grave of your predecessors."

Coordinate announcements When the time comes to publicly announce that you have been hired for a new position, the announcement should be coordinated between your current and future employers. Consult both of them with the goal of agreeing on a date when the news will be public.

NEGOTIATING COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

The relationship between a preferred candidate and an employer—whether that's a council or other governing body or an individual supervisor—begins with the negotiation of a salary, fringe benefits, and other conditions of employment. At the outset, it's important to remember that compensation is a total package, not salary alone. A good framework for negotiations is the [ICMA Model Employment Agreement](#) for managers, which covers salary, benefits, and other conditions of employment that you may want to negotiate. You can also check with your state association to see if it has developed a model agreement tailored to the state.

ICMA provides compensation guidelines to assist governing bodies in negotiations. (See Appendix C in the [Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator](#) cited earlier.)

You should tell your prospective employer what you expect in terms of salary, benefits, and a contractual arrangement. If an executive recruiter is involved, he or she will have already provided this information. If the position is subject to a salary history ban, you may not be able to provide your current salary during the negotiations, but since it is a matter of public record, the negotiators may be aware of it.

Negotiating salary

The goal in negotiations should be to find common ground where both parties believe the level of compensation is fair and equitable. The key often lies in the early stages of the recruitment process, when a range was developed and communicated to candidates. The factors that most often influence the governing body's compensation offer are

- The salary of the incumbent or previous manager.
- The salary of managers in similarly sized communities and neighboring communities.
- The salary of highest-paid staff member.
- The current salary of the applicant (although this may not be fair given that salaries may vary greatly according to cost of living and other factors).
- A desire to offer at the lower end of the salary range with the opportunity for growth with proven performance.

The factors that most often influence a candidate's salary demand are

- The expectation of a compensation increase of 10–20 percent over his or her current position.
- The opportunity for professional growth and challenge.
- The local costs of living and housing—which you should have researched when doing your homework.
- Employment opportunities for a spouse or partner at his or her current compensation level.
- The perceived stability or volatility of the position.

- The stability of the government and ability to negotiate a fair severance package.
- A desire to lock in compensation at the higher end of the salary range, as raises may be limited in the future.

A good compensation package, with a severance provision, will make you stronger, more stable, and more independent in your job. When you're not afraid of the financial consequences of losing your job, you can devote more attention to your duties and responsibilities. The severance package environment has changed in many states; be prepared and know whether there are any state limitations on severance packages.

Compensation negotiations can be tense and in some states may occur in public. Governing body members negotiating with a preferred candidate for manager may view themselves in a position of power and have the attitude that if the candidate truly wants the position, he or she will take what they offer. At the same time, the candidate will try to improve his or her financial situation and may take the view that if the prospective employer is really serious about the job offer, it will pay what the candidate requests. This is the point at which the candidate has the most leverage he or she will ever have regarding the level of compensation.

Negotiating other benefits

Negotiations may cover other benefits as well, some of which are included in the [ICMA Model Employment Agreement](#):

- An automobile allowance.
- Contributions to a retirement plan.
- Relocation and housing expenses.
- Extra vacation or paid time off (hiring authorities often offer the minimum starting vacation, and this can often be negotiated upward).
- Flexible work schedule (whether or not you would like to take advantage of a hybrid work environment, the hiring authority's openness to the idea is an indicator of the organizational culture).
- Separation from employment (this is covered in the later section on "The Written Agreement."

Housing costs are a major consideration when a new position requires relocation. Regardless of national housing trends, it's always wise to take the following steps:

- Research the real estate in the city/county/region where you would likely reside. Use available online resources and don't rely on the hiring authority's knowledge of the regional housing market; it may be out of date and may not reflect your preferences regarding school districts, commuting times, spouse/partner employment, or other factors.
- If you find you cannot live within the required geographic limits without assistance, determine if the hiring authority is willing to help. If a recruiting firm is involved, they should make this inquiry for you. Otherwise, you should contact the hiring authority yourself and ask if they would consider a housing allowance.
- In your negotiations, include a request for at least one house-hunting trip for you and any family members/partner so you are able to decide on a neighborhood, consider schools if applicable, and discuss any other considerations.

You'll most likely be on the job before you've found your permanent home to rent or purchase. Consider including the cost of temporary housing during that time period in your compensation negotiations. The hiring authority may not be able to pay the full cost of the temporary housing and they will likely include a time limit (three to six months is not uncommon).

How does negotiating get under way?

Even more than the follow-up interview, the negotiating session is your opportunity to pursue in detail your personal and professional goals. As you negotiate the elements of a particular compensation package, think forward to your long-range plans and to the conditions that you will need to lead a satisfying life. If you're a candidate for an executive position, you know that you'll face a wide range of stresses and pressures on the job. If you add financial pressures, you do nothing but diminish your ability to perform

at peak efficiency. Negotiating for a good compensation package makes sense.

Be sure that you understand who has been given negotiation authority from your prospective employer. A recruiter, if involved, may sometimes serve in that role, as may the mayor or president of the council/commission or sometimes the city/county attorney. It is also important to note that in some states, negotiations may be an open, public process.

An effective and desirable way to initiate negotiation discussions is for you to provide a written, easily understandable copy of the salary and benefits you expect to receive in the new position. If you're not constrained by a salary history ban, provide your current salary and benefits. As you present your conditions for employment, be complete and comprehensive. Employers can become very uncomfortable with the candidate who presents conditions one or two at a time and always has "one more item" to discuss. Get it all on the table, conceptually at least; then deal with the specifics. A good way to handle this is by preparing a worksheet with four columns: (1) a list of benefits, (2) your existing benefit package, (3) what you expect to receive from your new employer, and (4) the terms that all parties agree on (see Appendix F).

Generally, "getting down to terms" may feel awkward. For that reason, you must be prepared to take the initiative in introducing and guiding the negotiation discussion. If you're a manager negotiating with a governing body, you should not assume that the elected officials understand the accepted employment practices in hiring a local government professional. Nor should you conclude that they have collectively discussed the employment conditions specifically acceptable to them as a group. This may be the first CAO selection this group has faced. Don't hesitate to lead, but don't come across as overbearing or condescending, either. Tact and diplomacy are called for at this point. Simply getting the negotiation session under control and organized will help. Finally, it's imperative that you be a good "explainer" as well as a good listener. What may appear to be resistance to a particular benefit may stem from misunderstanding, not from a refusal to negotiate.

Third-party involvement at this point can be helpful—whether you use an executive recruiter, a copy of the [ICMA Model Employment Agreement](#), or other sample agreements or letters of understanding. ICMA, the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National Association of County Administrators (NACA), and state leagues of cities and counties are good sources of information on the salaries and compensation packages of local government professionals around the country. ICMA provides mean, median, minimum, and maximum salaries in cities and counties by population group for each state. Salary and benefit data are available in [ICMA Survey Research: 2018 Salary Survey](#).

By using these sources, you can acquaint the appointing authority with the practices of other municipalities, provide discussion checklists, and emphasize the importance of a written agreement that formalizes for all involved exactly what conditions were agreed on during the negotiations. A written agreement is especially helpful to future governing bodies and will preclude the need for you to explain or defend previously granted employment conditions in the future.

If you're working with an executive recruiter, that person can facilitate the negotiations by providing the governing body with information about employment and appointment practices and expectations. Having such information in advance helps the employer relate in a more informed and positive manner to the candidate's comments or requests regarding salary or benefits. Information presented by a recruiter need not be restricted to the areas of discussion, but it does provide helpful background.

How aggressive should I be?

The manner in which you negotiate your employment conditions will create a lasting impression on the employer and may affect your future relations and the level of mutual confidence and trust that you can expect. The advice to “be yourself” is especially true during negotiations. The “real you,” your style, your approach to problem solving, your articulation of the alternatives relating to sensitive governmental and financial issues, your flexibility and openness, and

the overall manner in which you conduct yourself during negotiations will serve as the last and critical evaluation that the appointing authority uses to make its final decision.

Although reasonableness, honesty, and “give and take” should prevail during negotiation sessions, and the circumstances of both parties should be thoughtfully recognized, you should never be reluctant to present your qualities and abilities. Everything that is important to you should be on the table.

Whether you're a recent graduate or an experienced manager, you have a track record of achievements and definable, verifiable, predictable, and potential abilities to offer a local government—that's why you're the prime candidate. You should forthrightly present your worth, value, and commitment to the elected officials and community that you seek to serve. As you negotiate, bear in mind that, unlike the business sector executive, the local government executive does not have as strong an opportunity

Keys to successful negotiations and contracts

Here are some tips to help ensure that your negotiations will be successful:

- Seek to find common ground and a true understanding of the key issues and concerns for the candidate and the employer.
- Be flexible and creative in finding ways to structure a compensation package that both parties find acceptable.
- Maintain some flexibility but also avoid unrealistic expectations.
- Get the agreement in writing before any public announcement is made.
- If applicable, review the proposed total compensation package with your financial adviser.
- For a senior position, involve your personal attorney in the review of any employment agreement.

to bargain for a salary increase based on performance. In most cases, public sentiment and the political ceiling on salaries prohibit large salary increases.

The do's and don'ts of negotiating

Here are some suggestions to help you through the negotiating process:

- Do be yourself.
- Do stand firm for the things that are important to you, your profession, and your family, and know what your general limits are when you begin negotiations.
- Do keep faith with your career plans.
- Do be forthright and specific about your ability to carry out expectations; show enthusiasm for the position.
- Do negotiate for a total compensation package by getting all conditions on the table initially.
- Do recognize the employer's ability and willingness to pay.
- Do attempt to get the best compensation you can at the start, but appreciate the views of employers who are generous but want to see some performance first.
- Do exhibit flexibility, reasonableness, and openness to compromise.
- Do request specific information relative to living costs or benefits that may be unique to the area (e.g., a "requirement" to live in a certain area, club or social memberships and expectations).
- Do have a specific salary and benefits in mind; have a written handout listing current and desired employment conditions.
- Do ask to be evaluated regularly and to be compensated on the basis of performance.
- Do offer to draw up an employment agreement.
- Don't promise anything that you can't deliver; don't oversell yourself.
- Don't "play it tough"; you're not dealing with adversaries.

- Don't forget that your actions and demeanor reflect on you and the local government management profession.
- Don't assume that the interviewers know your worth as well as do the folks "back home"; convey the unique aspects of your background and your expertise that justify your negotiating position.
- Don't assume that the interviewers have an accurate knowledge of key staff salaries or benefits; attempt to secure or request such information for negotiation discussions.
- Don't boast to anyone about your superior negotiating skills or about how you "outdid" the governing body.
- Don't go overboard with details; not all factors can be reduced to writing.
- Don't negotiate for the position unless you are really interested; "practice" sessions are unprofessional and taboo.

How do I wrap up the negotiations?

The recruitment process has been long and arduous for all involved. After interviewing candidates, most employers want to make a hiring decision as soon as possible. They presume that candidates are similarly disposed and are prepared for a prompt response to an offer. So be prepared to say "yes" or "no" as soon as possible, but don't hesitate to consider a job offer or a salary proposal for a day or so. Tell the prospective employer that you're pleased to have been offered the job and you'd like to take some time to consider the offer. Be professional and respectful of the prospective employer's time, however, and be diligent in your evaluation of the offer.

Of course, you and the employer need time to commit your agreement to writing, but if you truly want the position, it's best to secure it with an immediate good-faith handshake and the promise of a prompt meeting to sign the agreement and make mutual public announcements of your appointment.

Again, the [ICMA Code of Ethics](#) addresses appointment commitment: "Members who accept an appointment to a position should report to that position. . . . Once a member has accepted

a formal offer of employment, that commitment is considered binding unless the employer makes fundamental changes in the negotiated terms of employment.”

Remember, too, that Tenet 3 of the Code requires a member accepting a CAO position to commit to the position for a *minimum of two years* except under very unusual circumstances. And members who accept assistant, analyst, or other local government positions should heed the guidance that a short tenure should be the exception rather than a recurring experience.

At this point, the employer is generally exhilarated over the completion of a major task and especially “high” on the new appointee. Untimely delays, new conditions, or surprises will nearly always result in disappointment, and they can erode a relationship that has not yet even begun.

Negotiate in good faith, establish conditions fair to both parties, and do your homework so that you can say YES! to an appointment offer and begin the new job as soon as possible. That’s the ideal wrap-up of any negotiation.

FINAL STEPS

In the final stages of the hiring process, an offer has been made, background checks have been completed, and negotiations are done. You’ve survived the initial media onslaught, the community interviews, and the governing board’s review, and you’re ready to call a moving company. But a few things remain to be done.

The written agreement

Written agreements vary in form. For staff positions and positions below the level of department head, a letter of agreement outlining the terms of employment and compensation often suffices. For senior positions, a more formal employment agreement is recommended, covering salary, benefits, and other conditions of employment.

An important part of the written agreement is a severance provision. The career of a city or county manager is often volatile; in some cases each meeting of the governing body represents a risk to the manager’s job security. Because of

the at-will nature of the position and the turnover and change among elected officials, candidates for these senior positions generally are advised to seek some protection through a severance provision that requires continuation of salary and benefits for a set period of time—usually from six to twelve months. The terms of the severance agreement are contingent on the person not being terminated for cause. Remember to ask the recruiter or check state statutes to determine whether there are any limitations on public servants’ severance packages.

The **ICMA Model Employment Agreement** recommends a severance provision of six to twelve months during which salary and many benefits would continue after termination. Sometimes an appointing authority holds firm on a severance provision of six months or less, which may feel uncomfortably short for the prospective hire. Further discussion and creativity may satisfy both parties—for example:

1. While maintaining a six-month severance, add a provision that requires a super majority vote for terminating a contract employee within 90 days following a change in the appointing authority (e.g., swearing in a new council member). Hence, on a five member appointing authority, where most governance issues require a majority vote (at least three out of five), a super-majority vote (at least four out of five) would be needed.
2. While maintaining a six-month severance, add a provision that authorizes the contract employee to earn one additional month of severance for each service year worked up to a maximum of six additional months. After six years of service the employee will have earned a total of twelve months of severance.
3. If the appointing authority is not agreeable to a six-month severance, consider offering a 90-day notice and then a three-month severance period or some similar combination of notice and severance.

It’s a good idea to ask your personal attorney or another attorney who is familiar with employment law to review the proposed employment agreement.

In the unhappy event that you and your employer eventually decide to part ways, you can use the [ICMA Model Separation Agreement](#) to negotiate the terms of your departure.

Relationships with your current employer

Once you've decided to accept an offer in another jurisdiction, you'll need to provide notice to your current employer and do whatever you can to ensure a smooth departure and transition. Meet with the mayor or board chair or your supervisor to communicate your decision, develop a notification hierarchy, and strategically assess the goals you should focus on during the transition. Give your employer sufficient notice—typically 30 to 60 days, or longer if you have a contractual obligation. If applicable, make certain the announcement is delivered to the governing body and staff before any public announcement is made. Discuss how to keep the public announcement positive.

Develop a transition plan

Unless your relationship has deteriorated badly, your employer will almost certainly welcome your assistance in providing continuity of management for the community and the organization. Offer to help develop a process for recruiting your replacement; perhaps help them select a search firm and/or create a job profile defining what they want in a candidate.

Prepare a written status report and transition plan for ongoing projects and issues and key staff contacts. This plan, which should be based on meetings with relevant staff, will help others in the organization keep things moving and provide a useful orientation for your successor.

These are among the topics a transition plan might cover:

- Briefing papers on key issues before the governing body.
- Major pending projects.
- An interim organization-wide succession plan, or at minimum a plan covering the senior executive team/management to ensure continuity of internal and external priorities.
- Budget/financial status (revenue and expenditure forecasts and options, with notes about any volatile areas).
- Capital improvement program.
- Economic development activity and options.
- Departmental performance objectives.
- Legislative priorities (local and state).
- Collaborative arrangements or plans with other jurisdictions.
- Any state or federal grants.
- Summary of municipal accomplishments during your tenure.
- Thoughts/advice for your successor.

Other suggestions:

- Avoid burning bridges. Take the high ground. If you're leaving, it may be because you're not happy with the current situation. Don't "get it off your chest" and say things that will cause controversy or ill feelings. Think about the time years from now when you're applying for another job and a local newspaper calls your former employer.
- If your current employment situation has eroded to the point that your employer can't wait to see you go, discuss an appropriate exit strategy. If you're a manager and the governing body wants you to move on, work out a timeline that is acceptable to both parties, taking into account the termination and severance provisions of your agreement.
- Be prepared to be blamed. After you leave, anything and everything that goes wrong will inevitably be wholly or partly blamed on you. Be thick-skinned; responding will only aggravate the situation.

Prepare for the "first 100 days"

Everyone has a personal style and may approach the first 100 days in a new job differently. Several examples are cited here. The accompanying sidebar is an article from the [December 2010 issue](#) of *Public Management* magazine entitled "New Manager Perspective: Tips for a Seamless

Text continues on page 48.

Tips for A Seamless Transition

1. **Have work-related transition plans.** This overall transition plan should include a plan for meeting with employees, labor leaders, community groups, and other local service organizations; a communications plan to introduce yourself and your management expectations to employees; and a plan for getting clear direction from elected officials on their performance objectives for you during the first year.

My employment contract spelled out that within the first 90 days the council and I were to develop performance objectives. This is extremely helpful for directing your time and attention.

2. **Create a personal transition plan also.** This plan should include things like where to live, where to buy locally whenever possible (the sales representative at the local store where I bought my new appliances is, for example, the mom of a city employee), which grocery stores are located near your home, which dry cleaners are good, where to go to the gym, and other options for necessities.

Ask council members, department heads, and the outgoing CAO for their advice. The less time you spend figuring out what you need to know after you start, the easier your transition will be.

3. **Get comfortable being the center of attention for the first 100 days.** I met and shook hands with more people, attended more welcome parties, and gave more speeches than I ever imagined possible. To help tailor the message, I created a standard “show and tell” about me and then tweaked the message depending on the group I was addressing. At one of the presentations, I actually got a laugh—and perhaps endeared myself to a few in the audience—by admitting that I felt a little like a new baby panda at the zoo the way people were flocking to see me and hear me speak.

4. **Spend at least a few days in the community after your appointment but before you begin the new job.** There will be tons of curiosity—and some anxiety, too—about the “new manager.” This gives the new person an opportunity to start the process of getting to know the elected officials one on one (remember, these are your new bosses), the team of department heads, and the select members of a community. It also gives you a head start on tip number 2.

5. **Ask the departing manager and the department heads to prepare an orientation package for the incoming manager that can, for example, include these items:**

- Introductions and getting acquainted.
- Information about the organization: people, programs, and projects.
- Goals and objectives: departmental responsibilities.
- Key policy documents.
- Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats—in one page!
- Department field tour, including suggestions for the future.
- Suggestions about community leaders to meet, from a departmental perspective.

Do your best to review the package at least a couple of times before your first day, but don't have high expectations that you'll retain it all. Plan to go back to review it after 30 days and again after 60 days. It will be a great resource once you have context about the who, what, where, when, and why of the organization.

6. **Ask the elected officials to take you on a tour of the community.** A guided tour is an incredible tool to get to know the councilmembers, their focus, and some interesting tidbits about the local government that you might not have learned otherwise. It also gives you the opportunity to learn your way around the community like an insider. In my case, my tour guide—the councilmember—was also the driver.

During your tour, be open to new ideas. One councilmember asked me if I was willing to take the tour on a bicycle (San Luis Obispo is a bike-friendly community), and I agreed. Another councilmember is a private pilot, and he suggested that we take to the air for our tour. . .

7. **Prioritize meet-and-greet opportunities.** Many people will want to get to know you, and you will need to space out your get-togethers with current and former elected officials, department heads, employees, members of the media, chamber of commerce officials, representatives from major employers, community members, union representatives, and others.

Pace yourself because the meeting and greeting will take months, not weeks. But definitely get out, including spending time with employees in their own work environments. So far, I have trimmed trees, welded, changed tires, spent St. Patrick's Day on patrol with the police department (which included a code 3 incident), toured our reservoirs and dams, and seen the inner workings of the water treatment plant and wastewater treatment plant.

I also perused the bus depot and rode the busiest route, finished concrete, and cut the grass in a park . . . It was an invaluable investment in getting to know our dedicated employees and the issues that our community faces.

8. **Train yourself to recognize that it is a learning opportunity when you hear people say, "Well, when the former manager was here, he used to. . ."** There will also be times when people contact the former manager to seek an opinion on a topic, but they do not contact the current manager. Remember that these are all data points and can be used to guide you in many directions—not just in the opposite direction—to prove that a new manager is in charge now.

In the end, there are lots of people who want you to be successful, including the elected officials, the department-head team, other local government employees, caring members of the community, and—we hope—your predecessor. Take advantage of these tips and the advice and counsel of those who offer to assist—all of this taken together will lead to a smooth transition in your new community.

Source: Katie Lichtig, "New Manager Perspective: Tips for a Seamless Transition," in the [December 2010 issue](#) of *Public Management* magazine. This article was written when Lichtig was city manager of San Luis Obispo, California, describing what she did in her first 100 days to help ease the transition from one local government manager to the next.

Transition.” It was written by Katie Lichtig when she was city manager of San Luis Obispo, California, describing what she did in her first 100 days to help ease the transition from one local government manager to the next.

The following advice was offered by James Bacon Jr. when he was city manager in Decatur, Illinois:

Take care of your community

- Learn community basics as soon as possible (names of streets, neighborhoods, great places to meet people, and names of local government employees).
- Subscribe to local news before day one, and read old stories for a sense of history.
- Accept all speaking invitations. (Use a phrase or technique that will make your topic memorable as well as significant.)
- Develop a way to evaluate how the residents view your position and local government operations.
- Volunteer to serve on a civic board, the Cancer Society, the United Way, or another public service organization. Be careful, however, not to overextend yourself.
- Observe projects and problems firsthand.

Take care of your organization

- Meet the employees in their workplaces.
- Spend time with the office staff.
- Insist on annual performance evaluations both for yourself and for department directors.
- Attend the meetings of resident advisory boards and commissions.
- Thoroughly familiarize yourself with the annual budget document, annual audit, and city or county code.
- Take all phone calls. Screen them later.
- Let the administration before yours fire the

employees they think need to be fired.

- Arrange the office the way you want it. Add personal touches.
- Avoid comparisons such as “The way I did it in my last position was...”
- List your mobile phone number and e-mail address on your business card.
- Ask the governing body to provide you with a list of community activists and business leaders, and meet with each of them personally.
- Prepare for the governing board a summary of who you met with and a list of key issues you’ve learned from your community interviews.
- Attend a wide range of civic events.
- Initiate regular meetings with the media.

Take care of yourself

- Declare that your new address is “home.”
- Identify at least three specific, positive things about your new community that you are willing to share with anyone.
- Say yes to social invitations.
- Develop a clear set of expectations about what you wish to accomplish, and convey these expectations to everyone.
- If possible, move the family only once and as soon as you can.
- Become accessible and involved.
- Reestablish your personal support networks as soon as possible.

CONCLUSION

With a written agreement in hand, a transition plan arranged with your current employer, and a “to-do” list for your first 100 days, you’re ready to embark on an exciting new job in a new community. All your hard work has now paid off!

APPENDIX A: PAST TASK FORCES

(affiliations at the time of service)

ICMA TASK FORCE ON JOB HUNTING RESOURCES (2013-2014)

Chair

Joyce Shanahan, City Manager, Ormond Beach, FL

Members

Michelle E. Bailey-Hedgepeth, Town Administrator, Capitol Heights, MD

Anthony W. Brown, Assistant to the City Administrator, Wauwatosa, WI

Jason F. Earl, Budget & Management Analyst, Broward County, FL

Autumn Monahan, Communications Manager, Issaquah, WA

Kent Myers, City Manager, Fredericksburg, TX

Marcos Nichols, Student, Norwich University, Northfield, VT

Cole S. O'Donnell, ICMA-CM, City Administrator, East Moline, IL

Peter L. Olson, Town Manager, Yorktown, IN

Gary M. Palmer, Assistant Town Manager, Farragut, TN

Noah A. Simon, Assistant County Manager, Floyd County (Rome), GA

Byron D. Smith, ICMA-CM, City Manager, Fort Madison, IA

Kennetha K. Styles, Student, Walden University, Minneapolis, MN

Mark Swenson, Student, University of Illinois, Chicago, IL

Carl E. Weber, Director of Member Services, New Hampshire Public Risk Management Exchange, Concord, NH

Bonilyn F. Wilbanks, Town Administrator, Malabar, FL

Dianna S. Wright, Director of Resource Management, Olathe, KS

ICMA TASK FORCE ON JOB HUNTING RESOURCES (2004–2006)

Chair

Gordon R. Anderson, Assistant City Manager, Santa Monica, CA

Members

Adam T. Brumbaugh, Township Manager, College Township, PA

Robert J. Bruner Jr., Assistant City Manager, Ypsilanti, MI

Barry A. Burton, County Administrator, Lake County, IL

Ian M. Coyle, Village Treasurer, Brockport, NY

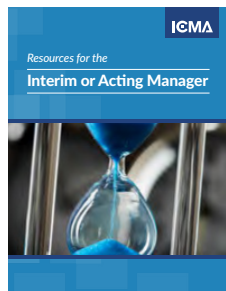
Bernice T. Duletski, Assistant County Manager, Johnson County, KS

Frances A. Gonzalez, Assistant City Manager, San Antonio, TX
Bobbie R. Hamilton, Senior Economic Development Specialist, San Antonio, TX
David W. Johnston, Village Administrator, Rantoul, IL
Christal L. Kliewer, Assistant to the City Manager, City of Grand Prairie, TX
J. Thomas McCarty, County Administrator, Eau Claire County, WI
Shawn P. McElroy, Cleveland State University, OH
Bobbi C. Peckham, Partner, Peckham & McKenney, Sacramento, CA
Sharon L. Peterson, Assistant Village Administrator, La Grange, IL
Edward L. Sealover, County Manager, Habersham County, GA
Steven E. Sheiffer, City Manager, Janesville, WI
Betsy Sherman, ICMA Staff Liaison
Byron D. Smith, Assistant City Manager, Poplar Bluff, MO
Charlene Stevens (ICMA Board Liaison), Assistant Township Manager, Lower Gwynedd, PA
Harry Still III, Chief Executive Officer, Etowah County, AL
Alesia Grace Thompson, IT Coordinator, Cincinnati, OH
Patrick J. Thompson, County Administrator, Jefferson County, CO
Steven T. Thompson, Chief Financial Officer/Assistant City Manager, Virginia Beach, VA
David C. Toland, Special Assistant, District of Columbia
Ryan J. Waller, Administrative Assistant to the City Manager, Highland Park, IL

APPENDIX B: ICMA CAREER RESOURCES

ICMA CAREER GUIDES

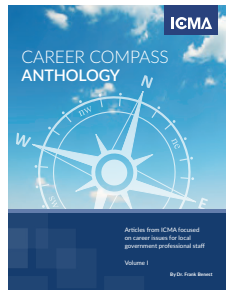
ICMA's Career Guides are local government professional toolkits to help you thrive, from finding a position to succeeding as a first-time manager, or how to break into the profession from another field, and preparing the next generation through internships and Fellowships. Find all these guides at icma.org/career-resource-guides.



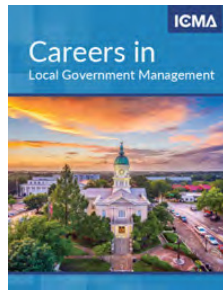
Acting Manager's Handbook is a guidebook to help the acting manager make the most of a sometimes-unexpected opportunity. (Member Resource)
icma.org/actingmgr



Breaking into Local Government will help career-changers enter the local government sector. Cases include private sector, military, and other government sectors.
icma.org/breakingintolg



Career Compass is a monthly column from ICMA focused on career issues for local government professional staff that appears in the ICMA Newsletter and online.
icma.org/careercompass



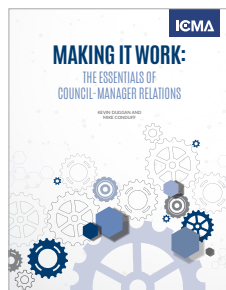
Careers in Local Government Management is an introduction to local government as a career, what city/town/county management is, what managers do, and tips on education, skills, and job opportunities related to the profession.
icma.org/careersinlg



First-Time Administrator's Handbook covers items that should be considered before an interview, during an interview, before accepting a position, and before starting a new position. (Member Resource)
icma.org/newmanager



Job Hunting Handbook is a resource that covers topics ranging from mapping out your job search to negotiating compensation. (Member Resource)
icma.org/jobhandbook



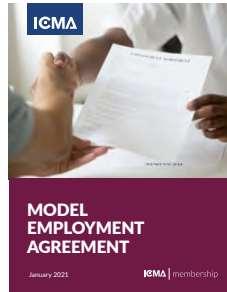
Making It Work: The Essentials of Council-Manager Relations provides the competencies needed to build a relationship that is based on mutual respect, understanding of roles, and open communication.
icma.org/councilrelations



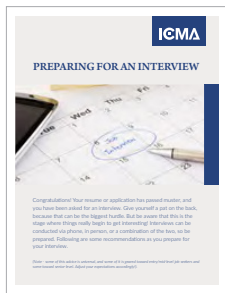
Management Internships: A Guidebook for Local Governments helps local government managers and MPA programs work together to create meaningful internship experiences.
icma.org/internships



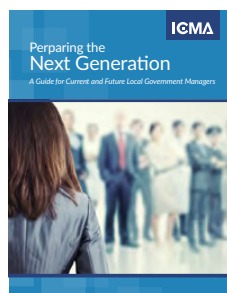
Manager Evaluations Handbook is a template for new or tenured managers to help elected officials design an effective evaluation tool. (Member Resource)
icma.org/evaluation



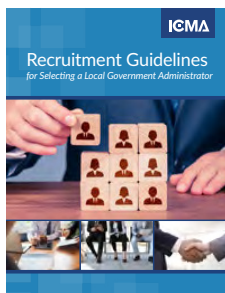
Model Employment Agreement is a template for municipal government administrators to use in crafting terms of hiring and employment. (Member Resource)
icma.org/employmentagreement



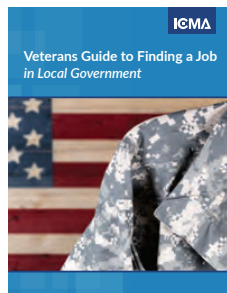
Preparing for an Interview offers helpful hints once you've passed the resume screening and have been called in for a discussion.
icma.org/interviewguide



Preparing the Next Generation Case Studies highlights programs being used by local governments that believe it is their responsibility to mentor young and mid-career professionals. (Member Resource)
icma.org/nextgencases



Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator presents guidelines to help local governments and executive search firms conduct a successful recruitment for a local government administrator/chief administrative officer.
icma.org/recruitmentguidelines



Veterans Guide to Finding a Job in Local Government offers tips and tactics to help veterans get the job they want in local government.
icma.org/veterans-jobs-guide

Explore more career resources at icma.org/career-resource-guides

ICMA | membership

FIND ALL YOUR CAREER RESOURCES NEEDS AT ICMA.ORG

ICMA Code of Ethics Support:

icma.org/ethics

Find a Job at ICMA's Job Center:

icma.org/job-center

Find a Coach at ICMA's Coaching Program:

icma.org/coaching

Search for Internships and Fellowships:

icma.org/find-internships-fellowships

Explore hosting an ICMA Management Fellow:

icma.org/host-fellow

Consider teaching or lecturing to inform students about the profession:

icma.org/teach

Visit an ICMA student chapter:

icma.org/student-chapters

Learn about the ICMA Credentialed

Manager Program:

icma.org/credentialing

Grow in your career through professional development:

icma.org/university

ICMA Veterans programs:

icma.org/veterans

Contact our team with questions

- To post a job ad: advertising@icma.org
- Questions about the ICMA Management Fellowship: lgmfprogram@icma.org
- Questions about ICMA Coaching: coaching@icma.org

APPENDIX C: PREPARING YOUR RÉSUMÉ

Set aside quality, uninterrupted time to prepare your résumé. Begin by assembling a rough draft of basic facts, such as your contact information, your employment history (including summer jobs, if you're a recent graduate), and your education—all with dates.

Next, reflect on each position you've held and list your roles, responsibilities, and key professional accomplishments for each. You'll probably end up with a lengthy list, which you can draw on to create a "basic" résumé.

Your basic résumé should, of course, honestly portray your experience and accomplishments. Importantly, however, when you plan to apply for a specific position, your résumé should be tailored to that position so that the person who reviews it can see that you meet the candidate profile.

As you write your résumé and prepare your other application materials, keep in mind the following ICMA Code of Ethics guideline: "A member's résumé for employment . . . shall completely and accurately reflect the member's education, work experience, and personal history. Omissions and inaccuracies must be avoided."

The ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct, which enforces the Code, takes this guideline very seriously, and members have been censured for misrepresenting their educational attainments or omitting jobs from their résumés. Short tenures in a position or organization, regardless of the cause, should be included in your résumé.

What format is most effective?

In most situations, the *chronological résumé* is the best choice for the local government applicant. This format paints a clear picture of your job history by placing your work experience in reverse chronological order (with the current or most recent job appearing first) by employer. Its easily understood format tells the reader where you've been professionally and what you've accomplished.

The *functional résumé* arranges your work experience according to general areas of proven ability in the organizations that have employed you rather than according to a time frame. The functional résumé is recommended only if your level of experience is so great that you cannot cover it chronologically in the space of two or three pages. Even then, think twice before using any format other than the chronological résumé. And be sure not to omit positions from a listing of your experience.

While some employers continue to accept résumés by regular mail, most now prefer electronic submittal. Thus, job seekers should be prepared to forward résumés and other application materials to prospective employers electronically. The cover letter and résumé should be in a PDF or other universal format and attached to an electronic message.

If a hard-copy résumé is requested, it should be prepared on a computer in a current Word format and printed on high-quality white or ivory paper using a laser printer. Above all, it should look neat, businesslike, and professional. "Mass-produced" résumés are not recommended. If your résumé appears to have been printed in quantity, the reviewer will probably believe that you're engaged in a wide-ranging search and are not serious about the specific position. You want your résumé to look as if you prepared it individually for each job.

How long should my résumé be?

As a general guideline, the résumé should be complete without being burdensome. Bear in mind that the reviewer may be reading a large number of résumés, and the more effort required to read a résumé, the less chance it has of ending up in the interview stack. But take care not to sacrifice clarity in an effort to save space. Spell out abbreviations on first use (except perhaps for state names) and be sure not to use "shorthand" that the reader may not understand.

If you're a recent graduate, or if your years of experience are fairly minimal, a one-page résumé may suffice. Typically, however, an experienced candidate cannot sufficiently cover all work history and education on a single page. Furthermore, a single-page résumé stands a higher chance of being overlooked or accidentally attached to the back of another applicant's résumé. A standard professional résumé is two to three pages in length, which is sufficient to convey current and past experience, accomplishments, and education. A lengthier résumé may give the reviewer the impression that the candidate is unable to deliver information concisely.

What does a basic résumé include?

Your résumé needs to anticipate and answer questions that a prospective employer will have when considering applicants. It's important to include key items of information so that your experience, responsibilities, and accomplishments are clear. When the reviewer reads your résumé, there should be no question about

- Where you went to school.
- What degrees you received.
- Your current/recent and past work experience, which should include
 - The name and contact information for each employer.
 - Your job title.
 - Your dates of employment.
 - Your professional and related activities.

Traditionally, a "Career Objective" section was used at the top of the résumé. A more modern approach might be to include a brief professional profile that summarizes your career. Guidelines for preparing a chronological résumé follow, and a sample résumé appears at the end of this Appendix.

Contact information Your name, mailing address, personal e-mail address, and phone number(s) should appear at the top of the résumé and on each subsequent page. The first page might include your social media handle(s), URL(s), or other online links. This information can appear in a style of your preference, but it is recommended

that it be in a larger font, centered, and bold. The last thing you want a reviewer to forget about you is your name. It's fairly common for an employer to contact candidates electronically, so you should provide a personal e-mail address that you check regularly. Phone numbers (with area code) may specify your work, home, and mobile information. It's wise to review your outgoing voice message on each of these contact numbers to ensure that it presents you in a professional manner.

Professional experience Your work experience represents the most important part of your résumé. In reverse chronological order, summarize your career history—but do not simply repeat the position description. Devote a paragraph to each position you've held, providing the most detail for your current or most recent job and placing less emphasis on positions you held earlier in your career. Use numbers and facts. Each listing in the "Professional Experience" section should provide the reader with an overview of your responsibilities and duties and illustrate your accomplishments and effectiveness.

If you're a recent graduate and/or have little professional experience at this point in your career, you can include experience in internships, college jobs, summer employment, significant class projects, and relevant extracurricular or volunteer activities as examples, highlighting the relevance of that background to the position for which you're applying.

When providing information about current and previous work experience, focus on your principal responsibilities (those areas for which you are or have been responsible and that you're capable of handling) and accomplishments (what you've actually done). You should highlight the variety of experiences you've had, but again, do not include a job description or a narrative from a class specification. Similarly, do not talk in general terms. Position titles may not adequately describe your duties and responsibilities, so be specific and relate your responsibilities and accomplishments to particular employers and positions. Be concise and use action verbs (e.g., *developed*, *supervised*, *implemented*).

Provide the following information for current and past employers:

- Name and location of employer.
- Title of your position.
- Dates of employment (provide both month and year to avoid any suggestion that you're trying to hide a gap in employment).
- Relevant data about the employer (e.g., city or county population, services provided, number of employees, size of budget).
- Information about your area and scope of responsibility (e.g., reporting structure, services provided, number of employees supervised, and size of budget for which you are/were responsible), including specific examples.
- Accomplishments, including specific examples (this is where you have the opportunity to tailor your résumé to the position for which you're applying).

If you have had short tenure in a position, you may choose to include a brief explanation for leaving it.

Education List your academic degrees and other educational accomplishments in reverse chronological order (newest to oldest). This information should indicate the school(s) you attended, your major or principal course of study, and the degree(s) you received. If you're currently pursuing a degree, make it very clear that the degree has not yet been awarded. It is not necessary, nor is it recommended, to list your education prior to college. If you're a recent graduate, you may want to note your grade point average and provide examples of relevant courses. For applicants with significant experience, information about your grade point average is not essential, but you may wish to include such academic honors as graduating *summa cum laude*, membership in Phi Beta Kappa, or significant scholarships or fellowships.

If you've been working for a number of years, it's important to show that you keep up to date with current management practices and issues in public administration and that your education is continuing. Don't waste space listing minor seminars and workshops that you've attended, but do selectively reference relevant coursework or educational activity after college. For example, it's important to note participation in programs at

the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, the Senior Executive Institute at the University of Virginia, and other recognized programs. Your goal is to show some familiarity with relevant subject matter and to demonstrate a pattern of continuing education.

Professional activities List professional activities that demonstrate the nature of your administrative leadership skills and your involvement, activity, and leadership in the profession in general. Include membership in related professional organizations and any articles and publications you've authored. Unless you have very few years of experience, don't list every speech you've given, every conference you've attended, every course you've taught, or every certificate you've received. Again, it's important to be selective. List the most important activities, the nature of the activity, the offices held, and/or the honors received. In summary, this section should suggest that you have a commitment to the profession. If space permits, a simple listing of significant memberships can be helpful and impressive.

Military service If you held a military commission or a professional assignment, you may wish to include it in the professional experience section of the résumé, and you can list significant service assignments, activities, and awards. If you did not serve in any capacity that is significant in terms of professional development, you should include only your service dates.

If you are transitioning to local government from a military career, see the sidebar on page 7 to learn about ICMA's resources for veterans.

References Unless specifically required, do not list references on your résumé. You may say "References available upon request." It's a fairly standard practice for employers to obtain a signed release from the applicant prior to contacting references. This release designates specific individuals named by the applicant who may be contacted.

If you choose to include references along with your résumé, prepare a separate page with their names and contact information. As mentioned earlier, in some places application materials may become public documents open to inspection by local media who are not bashful about contacting

current employers or references. Consider the potential negative consequences of submitting references in advance of an interview invitation or an offer of employment.

For further information on references, see the section in this handbook titled “Selecting your Professional References.”

Personal information In some ways résumés have come full circle. Decades ago, candidates included photos and personal information such as marital status and number of children on their résumés. That practice was abandoned to prevent employers from using personal information as a basis for screening candidates. While marital and family information is still not recommended for inclusion on a résumé, more and more candidates are including pictures or hyperlinks to their LinkedIn page, which usually includes a photo. There have been discussions about “bringing our whole selves to work,” which includes sharing information about your personal life, your hopes and dreams, and embracing each person’s individuality.

With respect to résumés there are several ways to incorporate appropriate personal information:

1. You include information on volunteering related to your current position and board/nonprofit service that ties back to your professional career. Examples might include service on chamber of commerce committees, service on your state association board, or volunteering at the city/county annual July 4 event.
2. You include service on boards that reflect your interests/passions outside of work and could still tie back to your position but are

not expected of you. Examples might include serving on the board for the Coalition for the Homeless, being a member of Rotary, serving on the YMCA Board.

3. You include additional information that provides more insights into your personal life, such as coaching a children’s sports teams, serving on the board of a religious institution, or membership in an advocacy organization.

All candidates can include information on their résumé that encompasses the first two approaches. If you include information outlined in the third approach, you may be exposing yourself to intended or unintended discrimination. Consider this carefully.

Attachments As a rule, the only attachments that should be included with your résumé are those specifically requested by the prospective employer. Unnecessary attachments may have a negative effect on your consideration for the position. If you use attachments, keep them to a minimum and be sure they are relevant, recent, and of specific interest. Do not attach letters of reference or recommendation, college transcripts, or certificates, but if you’re a recent graduate, be prepared for a prospective employer to ask you to arrange for a transcript to be sent.

Keeping your résumé current Experienced professionals know that it’s a good idea to keep a résumé current. Although you may not be actively seeking new employment opportunities, keep a list of special projects and assignments, successes, and accomplishments so that you’ll be prepared to update your résumé if and when it becomes necessary.

See sample résumé on page 58.

RACHEL SMITH

Contact Information:

+888.777.6666

RSmith@abc.com

111 Stephens Ave
Chicago, Illinois 11122

Education:

Master's in Public Administration
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL
2002-2004

Bachelor of Arts
Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas
1998-2002

Additional Skills:

- Public Speaking
- Social Media
- Strategic Planning
- Leadership
- Emergency Management
- Conflict Resolution

Community Involvement:

- International City/County Management Association (ICMA)
- Illinois City/County Management Association (ILCMA)
- Rotary Club
- United Way
- Lion's Club
- Chamber of Commerce

Additional Information:

- Fluent in English and Spanish

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

City Manager

May 2013 – Present

Manlius, Illinois—Population 55,000

Manlius is a vibrant community outside of Chicago with a daytime population of over 150,000 and a total budget of \$250 million. The City of Manlius has 400 employees.

- Annually managed and implemented the City's budget of \$250 million and the City's capital improvement budget of \$85 million. Coordinated the budget planning sessions with council members and department heads.
- Implemented an electric incentive program, that created savings of over \$500,000 to residents and businesses.
- Reduced the municipal property tax levy by 1% each year for the last five (5) years.
- Developed an Economic Development Incentive Program which resulted in two new industrial businesses and 450 new jobs.
- Developed a Revolving Loan Program for small business owners.
- Created a Street Improvement Program, passed a 0.25% sales tax referendum, and implemented a program that allowed the City to resurface an additional ten (10) miles of roads annually.
- Coordinated the application process for a \$5 million forgivable loan from the IEPA.

Director of Human Resources

January 2009 – April 2013

Sheffield, Illinois—Population 75,000

- Managed the Human Resources Department and directly supervised fifteen (15) employees.
- Acted as the lead negotiator for all collective bargaining agreements. Successfully negotiated union contracts with annual COLA's of no more than 2% per year and a contract term of four (4) years.
- Implemented an employee wellness initiative that saved the City over \$40,000 per year on premiums and implemented an annual employee benefits fair.
- Streamlined the hiring process for employees, implemented an online screening tool that reduced the hiring timeline by thirty (30) days.
- Organized, updated and managed all Human Resources files for employees.

Management Analyst

May 2004—March 2013

Walnut, Illinois—Population 25,000

- Implemented a paperless agenda process saving the city \$4,000 per year and decreasing staff time by two (2) hours per week.
- Created a new liquor license permit process and updated liquor license fees to be consistent with surrounding communities and generated an additional \$10,000 per year in revenue.
- Collaborated with the school districts on a program that allowed the City to place a School Resource Officer in each school and developed a comprehensive cost sharing tool that was approved by all parties.
- Produced board policies, ordinances and resolutions as requested.

APPENDIX D: COVER LETTER TEMPLATE

Notes on a cover letter: A cover letter should ideally be one page, convey your enthusiasm for the position, reflect your research on the organization and community, and show how your experience and skills will be a fit. Here is a template:

Date

Name and Address of Hiring Authority

Dear _____:

I am very excited to apply for your [insert title here] position. I believe my combination of skills and experience make me a competitive candidate for this opportunity.

For the past ____ years, I've served as the _____ for the City/Town/County of _____. I've developed a wide variety of skills that I believe will serve your organization well. The attached resume provides a more thorough overview of my career, but I would like to highlight the following that I believe relates well to your opportunity:

- [Bullet point from experience that relates to this position – quantify any accomplishments such as grants acquired, budget development and management, volunteer coordination, social media outreach for community events, etc.]
- [Same as above]
- [Same as above]

In addition, I've collaborated with teams on key initiatives in our organization. which include... [insert specific work groups such as budget development, HR work, software implementation, DEI work].

[Include a statement of passion and energy for the profession and this position similar to the following.]

I have a passion for local government and a strong desire to contribute to local government operations and community engagement. I hope to have the opportunity to talk with you about my skills and experiences and how they fit with your _____ position.

Sincerely,

[Name, signature]

Other things to consider: If you know the community well or have visited the community, work that knowledge into your cover letter. If you are from out of state, indicate why you are specifically interested in this opportunity.

APPENDIX E:

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These are typical of questions that governing bodies often ask candidates for manager positions, but they may be asked of candidates for other positions as well.

1. Briefly tell us about your professional and personal background and your career goals and achievements.
2. Why are you interested in this position, and what do you have to offer the local government organization and the community as a whole? Why do you wish to leave your current position?
3. You have had the opportunity to review and compare yourself with the recruitment profile, to review background materials on the municipality, and to visit our municipal facilities and community. What are your candid reactions and observations? Are there any city/county/town/village operations with which you have not had previous experience? Any concerns at all about our community or operations?
4. How would you characterize your management style as it relates to your interaction with the mayor, governing body members, staff, employees, and residents?
 - A. What things are most important to you in a work situation?
 - B. How do you prefer to work: alone or as part of a team?
 - C. How do you keep informed about projects you have delegated?
 - D. How do you keep informed about employee morale?
5. How do you deal with a large municipal organization such as we have here to ensure that municipal departments are responsive to the needs and requests of elected officials and residents?
 - A. How many employees have you managed/supervised in your previous position(s)?
 - B. How do you assess the strengths and weaknesses of an organization? How do you identify opportunities to improve the organization?
 - C. How do you motivate, develop, and retain a professional staff?
 - D. Do you stand up strongly for your personal or staff recommendations?
 - E. How do you feel about performance evaluation? What process do you employ to set objectives and monitor performance?
 - F. What is your philosophy on employee development?
 - G. Have you ever had to terminate an employee? What process did you follow?
 - H. What experience do you have with labor relations?
6. How do you go about motivating the governing body, staff, and community groups toward working together for achievement of goals and objectives that are in the overall best interest of the community?
 - A. How do you keep the mayor and council or board informed of municipal activities and operations?
 - B. How do you carry out the governing body's policy decisions and directions?
 - C. How do you determine when to seek the advice of the governing body?
 - D. What do you do if you seriously disagree with a decision of the governing body?
 - E. How would the staff be involved with the mayor, governing body committees, individual governing body members, residents, and community groups?
7. In terms of effective financial management activities, what has been your experience in capital improvements programming, goal

- setting, performance budgeting, financial forecasting, development of alternative sources of revenue, and similar activities? How about bond rating successes?
8. What specific experience have you had involving high growth in communities you have served?
 9. What experience have you had in intergovernmental relations?
 10. What skills and experience do you have in maintaining a strong and comprehensive public relations effort and projecting a positive image of the local government and community?
 11. How do you work with the media?
 12. Do you have an overall philosophy or strategy regarding economic development?
 13. What technological innovations have you introduced in previous positions?
 14. How do you relate to residents and resident groups?
 15. What do you consider to be your strongest abilities as a public administrator?
 - A. What skills are you seeking to improve?
 - B. What are your major weaknesses?
 - C. What is the toughest management problem that you have ever faced?
 - D. What can you offer us that others can't?
 - E. What are your career goals, your future plans?
 - F. In your last position, what did you like the most? What did you like the least?
 - G. Why should we hire you?
 - H. What decisions are most difficult for you?
 - I. What are the reasons for your success?
 16. Should we decide on you as our final selection and check you out with past employers, employees, and community leadership, what would we hear?
 17. Are there any activities or incidents in your background that may reflect negatively on your performance or that would be awkward or embarrassing to us or you if disclosed publicly? Are there any such concerns or circumstances that we should be aware of or discuss at this time?
 18. Have you ever been terminated? If yes, please elaborate.
 19. Have you or any organization you have served been the subject of litigation over matters pertaining to civil rights violations, sexual harassment, or any similar subjects?
 20. We've asked you questions for a good time now; what questions do you have for us? What matters need further discussion? Please be candid.
 21. Should you be offered our position, what would be your availability? Your salary expectations? Would we need to agree on any conditions of employment (employee agreement, severance pay, or relocation assistance)?

APPENDIX F: COMPENSATION CHECKLIST

Note: If the state or jurisdiction has a ban on requesting salary history, you may need to withhold your current salary in the second column. You should also explore ICMA's CAO Salary Survey (2018) for additional details and examples. Market adjustments or inflationary changes may affect the actual numbers; this is intended as a simple example from a smaller community in a moderately priced area.

Benefit	Current employer	Recommended	Agreed
Employment agreement	One-year notice	Same	Six months
Salary	\$115,000	\$135,000	\$128,000
Pension	Employee contributes 5%	No participation	OK
Deferred compensation	Employer contributes 7%	12%	12%
Automobile	Leased, full-size; personal use	Allowance	Fleet vehicle
Health insurance	Full family coverage	Same	OK
Disability insurance	50% of salary after 90 days	Same	60%/120 days
Life insurance	\$100,000	\$150,000	\$100,000
Vacation	Three weeks	Same allowable 1st year	2 weeks 1st year 3 weeks 2nd year
Sick leave	68 days accumulated	30 day credit	OK
Business expense	All reasonable	Same	OK
Conference	State, national	Same	OK
Moving		Total	OK
House-hunting trip		Two with partner	One with partner
Relocation		Employer purchase	\$15,000 relocation payment



INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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202.962.3680 | icma.org