



*Job Hunting Handbook for
Local Government Professionals*

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Introduction

Job hunting is a time-consuming, anxiety-producing fact of life that is faced by virtually every university graduate and local government professional. 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, the ICMA Executive Board in 2004 appointed a Task Force on Job Hunting Resources to review and update the organization's *Job Hunting Handbook*. Members of the task force are listed on the following page, and this publication based on their work. Staff want to thank Task Force member Bobbi C. Peckham, Partner, Peckham & McKenney, for her additional contributions in readying it for distribution.

The task Force recognized the need to expand the scope of the prior handbook beyond its focus on those seeking manager positions. This handbook is designed for public administration students, recent graduates, and young professionals in their first or second jobs as well as experienced managers 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 administrators, and that they may come into local government from other fields.

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.

ICMA Task Force on Job Hunting Resources (2004-2006)

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ICMA is the premier local government leadership and management organization. Its mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advocating professional management of local government worldwide. ICMA provides member support; publications, data, and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to more than 8,200 city, town, and county experts and other individuals throughout the world.

Planning

Where are you in your career?

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?

Regardless of where you may be in your career, ongoing career planning is essential to a satisfying and successful professional experience. 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 through the provision of quality service to a community, its residents and businesses. As a local government professional, it is also your duty to take proactive responsibility for your own career development and work to create your own opportunities.

Self-assessment

The first step in the planning process is self-assessment, wherein you will assess your strengths and weaknesses and identify areas for development. 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. In addition, intangibles such as leadership, patience, common sense, flexibility, and a continual quest for learning are also assets.

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

Engaging in career planning

Career planning involves looking rather than waiting for new career challenges. 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 of improvement identified in your self-assessment.

Next, take the initiative to identify a mentor and coach within the profession. Engage your mentor as a resource, work diligently to maintain a positive and mutually beneficial relationship, and be open

to constructive feedback. In addition, network with others in the profession by becoming actively involved and learn others' stories and experiences.

Begin to identify quality organizations and assignments in which you can gain valuable experience. Finally, assess your resume and cover letter, interview preparation skills, interview skills, and understanding of compensation issues.

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

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 resume and cover letter, selecting and contacting professional references, and, if you're seeking a senior position, perhaps making your interest known to an executive recruiter, or "headhunter." 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 a moment on two factors that are themes throughout this handbook: your responsibilities under the ICMA Code of Ethics and the strong possibility that that your job search will take place at least partly in the public eye.

Ethics Integrity and hopefully 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 commit to serve a minimum of two years in order to render a professional tenure (the sidebar on the next page 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 ICMA Code of Ethics that specifically address job search issues, it's recommended that you review the entire Code before you launch your search. Even the most seasoned individuals have found themselves in ethical 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. Even if the law doesn't require disclosure, a commitment to transparency, especially in filling very senior positions in the organization, will lead local governments to provide details on potential candidates. You need to be aware of this as you prepare and submit applications, select references, accept invitations for interviews, and visit the new community where you want to work.

Finding the vacancies

By actively seeking out leads, reading professional publications, and networking, you can start on the path of identifying the right job for you. Resources for identifying job vacancies include current and

former local government officials, retired administrators, senior ICMA staff, ICMA Range Riders and Senior Advisors in many states, executive recruiters, ICMA's online [JobCenter](#), state municipal league directors and staff, directors of college and university public administration programs, the [National League of Cities](#), the [National Association of Counties](#), the [National Association of County Administrators](#), the [American Society for Public Administration](#), and a variety of local, regional, state/provincial, and national professional organizations.

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

In addition to these sources, don't underestimate the importance and value of professional

Job Hunting and the ICMA Code of Ethics

The [ICMA Code of Ethics](#) provides guidance for members at every stage of the job-hunting process. The full code is available on the ICMA Web site. Take particular note of the following guidelines:

Seeking employment Members should not seek employment for a position having an incumbent administrator who has not resigned or been officially informed that his or her services are to be terminated.

Professional respect Members seeking a management position should show professional respect for persons formerly 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 in order to be appointed to a position.

Credentials An application for employment . . . should be complete and accurate as to all pertinent details of education, experience, and personal history. Members should recognize that both omissions and inaccuracies must be avoided.

Appointment commitment Members who accept an appointment to a position should not fail to report for that position. This does not preclude the possibility of a member considering several offers or seeking several positions at the same time, but once a *bona fide* offer of a position has been accepted, that commitment should be honored. Oral acceptance of an employment offer is considered binding unless the employer makes fundamental changes in terms of employment.

Length of service A minimum of two years generally is considered necessary in order to render a professional service to the local government. A short tenure should be the exception rather than a recurring experience. However, under special circumstances, it may be in the best interests of the local government and the member to separate in a shorter time. Examples of such circumstances would include refusal of the appointing authority to honor commitments concerning conditions of employment, a vote of no confidence in the member, or severe personal problems. It is the responsibility of an applicant for a position to ascertain conditions of employment. Inadequately determining terms of employment prior to arrival does not justify premature termination.

networking. If you currently work in local government, your network no doubt includes managers and colleagues in other communities, members of professional associations, and mentors from earlier positions. In you're a student or a recent graduate, a network can also include alumni from your school who work in local government. 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 mid-career 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 a wide range of local governments. When the right job comes up, they can contact you immediately 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 that his or her services are to be terminated, you should not apply for the position.

Doing your homework

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 resume and cover letter tailored for each one. The effort you put into this homework will benefit you in several ways. First, it will help you determine your "fit" with the organization and community; and second, the knowledge and familiarity you're able to share in an interview will prove you to be a serious candidate. Realize that if you don't take the time to prepare, and other candidates do, it will show.

Homework includes studying and securing background information on the position, the organization, and the community. In years past, applicants 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.

When scouring the Internet, you should visit the municipal Web site and the Web site of the local newspaper. Conduct a search on the municipality and its leadership, governing body agendas and minutes, organizational chart and budget, capital improvement program and other documents. Read random issues of the newspaper to develop an overall picture of the community. Be sure to read the issues published immediately prior to the job vacancy to understand why the job is vacant and what caused the former officeholder to leave, and read issues published just before the last election for insight into the makeup of the governing body.

Unless the employing jurisdiction is nearby, a field visit at this stage of the application process may not be realistic, particularly for students or recent graduates. If you can visit the community, however, walk around, stop in at local shops and restaurants, and attend a meeting of the governing body. Stop by the local library and review budgets, reports, and studies kept on file. Familiarize yourself with the general history of the area and brush up on current events and significant projects.

Many of the sources suggested earlier in the section on "Finding the vacancies" can also provide information. Tap your personal network for colleagues from nearby communities or from 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: don't hesitate to contact them to get their perspective—even if you don't know when personally.

The information that you'll need and the extent of research that you'll do will vary depending on the type of position in which you're interested. You should, however, learn as much as you can about the position, organization, and community regardless of the level of the position.

Your resume

“You have ten seconds to make an impression.” While the resume and 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. As the primary written vehicle for communicating your experience, accomplishments, relevant skills, and overall qualifications, your resume is the document that permits the employer to compare you with other applicants. It is also the means by which you make your first impression. When you're an applicant, the resume 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 resume and cover letter as they are by your actual experience. These documents offer you an opportunity to create a good first impression and to distinguish yourself from the other applicants in the minds of the reviewers.

What should a resume do?

Your resume 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 resume shows that you meet the minimum requirements, it will go into the stack reserved for qualified applicants. A subsequent screening of the resumes will result in a smaller group of candidates for further review and consideration and ultimately a preliminary interview.

The initial review of a resume 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 resume. In some cases, resumes are placed in databases and searched by key words to narrow the field of applicants.

It's no easy trick to prepare a resume that will stand out from the others and inspire someone to invite you for an interview. You may have the necessary credentials, but if your resume doesn't convey this, you won't be interviewed.

Don't expect anyone reading your resume to do your work for you and to read between the lines. The resume must communicate both your track record and your personality. It should suggest that you're organized and conduct your affairs in a businesslike fashion. It should send positive messages about your abilities and illustrate that you are current and innovative in your professional field. It 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 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.

When it comes to conveying specific, factual information about your background and experience, the resume should put you and your background in perspective. Among other things, it should provide a clear, consistent, and understandable profile of your education, previous employers, and other work-related activities, and it should be specific as to your scope of responsibility and accomplishments. If you're a recent graduate and/or have little professional experience at this point in your career, you can include experience in internships, summer employment, significant class projects, and relevant extracurricular or volunteer activities as examples.

Who will review my resume?

Depending on the situation, resumes 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, or executive recruiters. Based on their individual backgrounds, perceptions of the position, educational history, and other variables, each reviewer draws his or her own conclusions as to whether your resume should be selected for further consideration.

When you apply for a position, be aware that in some places your application materials, including resume, cover letter, salary history, and references, may be considered public documents available and open to review. In these cases, especially for high-profile positions such as city or county manager, 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 so, and if you still choose to apply, be prepared to answer questions from the media—and from your current employer.

How do I write a resume?

Set aside quality, uninterrupted time in order to prepare your resume. Begin by assembling a rough draft of basic facts: your contact information, employment history (including summer jobs, if you're a recent grad), and education. Next, reflect on each position you've held, your roles and responsibilities, and your key professional accomplishments, and list them. You'll probably end up with a lengthy list, and you can draw on this list to create a "basic" resume of your experience.

Your basic resume should, of course, honestly portray your experience and accomplishments. Importantly, however, when you plan to apply for a specific position, your resume should be tailored to that position so that the person who reviews it can see that you meet the candidate profile. When applying for a position, begin with your basic resume and then tailor it accordingly. By taking the time to tailor your resume, you'll present yourself as a more attractive candidate for the position.

As you write your resume and prepare your other application materials, keep in mind that the ICMA Code of Ethics has a guideline saying: "An application for employment . . . should be complete and accurate as to all pertinent details of education, experience, and personal history. Members should recognize that both 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

resumes. Short tenures in a position or organization, regardless of the cause, should be included in your resume.

What format is most effective?

In most situations, the *chronological resume* 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 resume* 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 resume 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 resume. And be sure not to omit positions from a listing of your experience.

While some employers continue to accept resumes by regular mail, many now have a preference for electronic submittal. Thus, job seekers should be prepared to forward resumes and other application materials to prospective employers electronically. The cover letter and resume should be attached in a Word or Adobe format to an electronic message.

If a hard-copy resume is required, it should be prepared on a computer in a current Word format and printed on high-quality white or ivory paper using a laser jet printer. Above all, it should look neat, businesslike, and professional. "Mass produced" resumes are not recommended. If your resume 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 resume to look as if you prepared it individually for each job.

How long should my resume be?

As a general guideline, the resume should be complete without being burdensome. Bear in mind that the reviewer may be reading a large number of resumes, and the more effort he or she has to put into reading a resume, 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. Avoid using abbreviations (except perhaps for abbreviations of 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 resume may be sufficient. Typically, however, an experienced candidate cannot sufficiently cover all of his or her experience and education on a single page. Furthermore, a single-page resume stands a higher chance of being overlooked or accidentally attached to the back of another applicant's resume. A standard professional resume is two to three pages in length, which is sufficient to convey current and past experience, accomplishments, and education. A lengthier resume may give the reviewer the impression that the candidate is unable to deliver information concisely.

What does a basic resume include?

Your resume 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 resume, there should

be no question about where you went to school; what degrees you received; your current and past work experience, including the name of each employer, job title, and dates of employment; and professional and related activities. And, of course, there should be no question about how to contact you.

Traditionally, a “Career Objective” section was used at the top of the resume. A more modern approach might be to include a brief professional profile that summarizes your career. Guidelines for preparing a chronological resume are presented in the following paragraphs, and a sample resume appears in Appendix B.

Contact information Your name, mailing address, e-mail address, and phone number(s) should appear at the top of the resume. 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 an 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.

Education List your academic degrees and other educational accomplishments in reverse chronological order. 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. For applicants with significant experience, detailed 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’re a recent grad, you may want to note your grade point average and provide examples of relevant courses.

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 on your resume listing minor seminars and workshop sessions that you’ve attended, but do reference other relevant coursework or educational activity after college on a selective basis. 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, or another recognized program. Your goal is to show some familiarity with relevant subject matter and to demonstrate a pattern of continuing education.

Professional experience Your work experience represents the most important part of your resume. In reverse chronological order, summarize your career history. Devote a paragraph to each position you have held, including 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, if possible. 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.

Recent graduates can include internships, college jobs, summer jobs, and similar experiences as part of their career history, highlighting their relevance to the position for which they are applying.

Applicants with more experience can reference internships or other experiences that are relevant to their careers but should not list information regarding high school, college, or part-time jobs unless there is a substantive reason for doing so.

When providing information about current and previous work experience, focus on your principal responsibilities (those areas for which you're responsible and which you're capable of handling) and accomplishments (what you've actually done). You should highlight the variety of experiences you've had, but do not include a narrative from a class specification or job description. 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:

- Title of your position
- Name of the employer, location, and dates of employment (provide both the 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 responsible), including specific examples
- Accomplishments, including specific examples (this is where you have the opportunity to tailor your resume to the position for which you are applying).

Again, information on current and past work experience should be complete without being burdensome. If you have had short tenure in a position, you may choose to include a brief explanation for leaving it.

Professional activities Include 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 that you have 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 as a listing in the professional experience section of the resume, 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 on the resume.

References Unless specifically required in the application process, do not list references within your resume. 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 resume, prepare a separate page with their names and contact information. As mentioned earlier, depending on state laws, 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 offer or in advance of an offer of employment.

For further information on references, see the section entitled “Selecting your professional references.”

No personal information and photographs There is no value in including personal data in the body of the resume. It detracts from your message and places the resume reviewer in the awkward position of having access to information that he or she otherwise is legally prevented from requesting. Photographs are not necessary and not recommended.

Attachments As a rule, the only attachments that should be included with your resume are those specifically requested by the prospective employer. Unnecessary attachments may have a negative effect on your consideration for the position. If you use them, 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 resume current Experienced professionals know that it’s a good idea to keep your resume 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 resume if and when it becomes necessary.

Your cover letter

What is the purpose of a 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 nearly as important as the resume and should be an “original masterpiece.” In many cases, the reviewer will not even read a resume unless it is accompanied by a cover letter.

A good cover letter will impress the reader not only with your skills and experience, but 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 resume 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.

How do I prepare the cover letter?

Like the resume, the 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. See Appendix C for a sample cover letter.

To customize your letter, draw on 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 listing 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. In the first sentence, you should attempt to 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 resume. Indicate your enthusiasm for the position and “ask for the job”!

As noted earlier, many employers now request electronic applications, with the cover letter and resume attached to an e-mail message. But if the letter and resume are sent by “snail mail,” print the cover letter on plain white or ivory paper or on personal (not business) stationery. Be sure to mark the envelope “Confidential.”

Are my resume and cover letter ready to send?

Be aware that you will draft and edit your resume 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 advisor 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 resume 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

Whom should I ask to serve as a reference?

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

- Distinguished in your organization, your community, and/or in 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, available, and articulate in giving a reference
- Willing and able to maintain confidentiality.

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 of 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.

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. Be sure to explain to your references your desire for the job, your future interests, and any new accomplishments of which they may not be aware. Provide them with a copy of your resume to furnish additional information about your background and 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 and your negative attributes. Make it clear that you want them to give honest opinions.

Just as you tailored your resume 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 resources 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. First, you should select references based on the skills you want to spotlight for each particular position. And second, 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 reference, consider also when you will notify your current employer that you are seeking another position. From a tactical perspective, it's best if they hear 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 at this stage. 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 in the past, 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 manager, 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, business leaders or other professionals who have worked with you in the community can also be good sources.

Experienced executives If you're a manager applying for another manager 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 they 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 seeking to move from another field 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, be sure to 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 regarding my references?

Whether you provide reference information with your resume or later in the recruitment process, key information should include the person's name, position, and employer; 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. Update 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—over and over. 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.

Working with executive search firms

Some employers, and some job-seekers at relatively senior levels, work with an executive search consultant, or "headhunter" to assist in placement. Executive search consultants are personnel experts who are retained by the employer to actively recruit and screen qualified applicants for a position.

Executive recruiters work on behalf of their client governments or agencies rather than for candidates. A search firm may offer its services nationwide or focus on a particular geographic region and/or industry specialty.

The use of executive search firms in the field of local government began in the mid-1970s. Today, with the increasing numbers of baby boomers retiring and the resulting “war for talent” in local government, cities and counties often opt for the services of search firms to help them market job opportunities and identify and recruit qualified candidates.

Why do local governments use executive recruiters?

Although executive search can be performed by in-house human resource 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.

In deciding whether to use an executive search firm, the employer 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 needed employee for an extended length of time. Often they conclude that the cost is a good investment.

What is the role of a headhunter?

Executive recruitment firms are retained by, and work on behalf of, employers. While the majority of 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. They do not work on behalf of candidates.

That being said, local government professionals should keep in mind that executive recruiters can be a valuable resource in their career growth. Establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with recruiters can benefit you by providing a sounding board for career guidance, assistance in resume preparation, constructive feedback on interview skills, and an assessment of your strengths and experience gaps.

How does the executive search process work?

Once the employer has selected a firm, the multi-step process of professional recruiting begins. Each step is managed by the search firm in partnership with the client:

- Evaluation of the position and employment need
- Outreach through advertising, direct marketing, and networking
- Candidate screening and evaluation
- Preliminary interviews
- Reference and background checks
- “Short list” recommendation to the employer
- Finalist interviews
- Selection and negotiations.

The search begins with an evaluation of the employer's need with regard to the position. 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 goal of this evaluation is to define and 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. The profile is then used to market the position to prospective candidates.

To recruit candidates, the firm places advertisements in appropriate professional publications and Web sites. 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 conducts personal interviews of the leading 10 to 20 candidates and conducts reference and background checks.

The search firm then provides a "short list" of recommended candidates to the employer 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 search firm also provides the employer with a list of all applicants for the position.

The employer then selects finalists (typically up to eight), 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, resume, interview skills, and experience gaps.

Once a single finalist is selected through the interview process, typically the recruiter works with the employer and the finalist 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 exchange of information to reach consensus.

Typically, the search firm stays in touch after the new hire comes on board to help smooth the transition and assure that the employer is satisfied with the hire. 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.

How to work with a headhunter

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.

Perhaps forgetting history, today's recruiters are often amazed at how few individuals contact them about particular openings. Recruiters view such contacts as opportunities to establish an ongoing relationship, and they encourage candidates to phone or send an e-mail. While recruiters typically have heavy travel schedules and commitments, many of them are happy to talk with individuals about specific positions or simply to 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, by describing yourself and your career objectives in a clear, concise,

and objective fashion, and by dealing straightforwardly. How you handle this contact determines your chances of becoming a prospect, and perhaps later a candidate, to that recruiter. Keep the recruiter informed of progress in your career by checking in from time to time.

Whether or not you take the initiative, at some point in your career you're likely to receive a call from a recruiter. If this occurs, you can be sure that the recruiter is doing one or more of the following: (1) sounding you out as a possible candidate if the recruiter believes you match the profile for a specific position or (2) determining whether you might be a source—in other words, whether you can suggest a candidate or two for a position. Although you may not be interested in the position, this is a good opportunity to establish a relationship with the recruiter by making referrals of potential candidates and letting the recruiter know your own career objectives and preferences. Discuss goals, objectives, and special projects that you've been working on, as well as desirable geographic locations where you'd like to move or your commute and family limitations. In brief, don't squander the opportunity to make yourself memorable to that headhunter.

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. 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. You don't need to appear desperate, but you should be respectful and professional; your behavior will affect how the recruiter presents you to the client.

If you accept an invitation for a finalist interview with the employer, 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 at a later date 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 "black list," they're not very forgiving when a job seeker takes advantage of them. Recruiters work hard to build a trusting relationship with their clients, and that relationship is jeopardized when a job seeker lets them down. Two of the most common embarrassments for recruiters are (1) the selected candidate declines an offer because he/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 the 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. On the other hand, establishing a good relationship can be an investment that pays off with little cost except an occasional phone call.

The selection process

The selection process begins when an employer or an executive recruiter screens resumes and cover letters and identifies likely candidates for the position.

Screening tools

The 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. During this process, the candidate will need to prepare for and participate in a number of sessions—and will also need to maintain a positive relationship with his or her current employer.

Early reference calls The employer may want to contact a few references to validate the information you have provided and get a “picture” of your personality and style. As an applicant, you will need to be prepared with a short list of references you can trust to keep your job search confidential at this point in the process. The employer will understand that this list is limited, based on the timing of these contacts. Again, be aware that reference information may be considered public record in some places.

Screening interviews The employer may also arrange screening interviews before selecting candidates for full on-site interviews. These screening interviews are normally conducted by telephone. However, some search firms choose to meet candidates personally for a “get acquainted” meeting. Whether a telephone or personal screening interview is scheduled, prepare for it as thoroughly as you would for a full interview.

If the screening interview will be by phone, you need to be in a comfortable environment with no interruptions or distractions. Plan an hour or so for the interview and keep a clock close by. Telephone interviews require that you work at establishing a sense of connectedness. If the interviewer doesn’t offer the information, ask how much time is allotted and how many questions will be asked.

While it’s difficult to judge how your message is being received by the interviewer, you may occasionally ask if you’ve answered the questions satisfactorily or if they need you to provide more detail. Avoid very lengthy responses; provide a clear and concise answer followed by a brief example. If you find that your responses are longer than five minutes each, tighten them up. As always, be professional and respectful throughout the interview.

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. 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 timeframe. 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 that is of concern to the employer. Your earlier homework will enable you to provide relevant responses that relate your knowledge and experience to local concerns. Again, be concise in your responses and check carefully for spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Personality profile questionnaire Some employers may ask you to complete a personality profile questionnaire. 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. A human personality is complex, and many of these questionnaires claim to 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. But if you decline to complete the profile, you may be eliminated from further consideration.

Video Some employers request videotapes. They may ask for a tape of you at a public meeting, a tape in which you respond to one or more specific questions, or a tape in which you generally describe yourself.

If you're asked for a tape, the quality is extremely important. If the video shows you responding to specific questions or describing yourself, you should prepare and rehearse. Then you'll need to decide whether to use a home video camera or a professional studio to record the tape—and there may be significant differences in quality and in how you appear. If the employer requests a tape 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.

Once you submit your resume, you need to be prepared for surprise and short-notice requests during the screening process. Thus, it is 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 you will be successful at each step and prepare for the next one.

Community and employer relations

As the selection process proceeds, it's critical to maintain a positive professional relationship with both the current and future employer and the current and future community. The ICMA Code of Ethics requires members to be committed to the highest ideals of honor and integrity in order to merit the respect and confidence of the elected officials, of other officials and employees, and of the public.

As you've learned by now, applicants for positions in the public sector should not have any expectation of confidentiality. 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 of your intent to pursue other opportunities. You should inform the employer—either the chief elected official and governing body or an individual supervisor—as soon as possible if you can expect that they will be professional about the news and not allow it to adversely affect their relationship with you or your ability to do your job.

At a minimum you must ensure that your employer is informed before any possible public release of your consideration by a new employer. And you should inform them 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 manager position, you should first call the mayor or chair of the presiding body 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.

Throughout the process, it's critical to maintain the trust and confidence of your current employer. Their finding out information from secondary sources or through the media will damage this relationship. You should be prepared as you begin the process with a succinct and straightforward answer to the question: "Why are you pursuing other positions?"

The interview process: Before, during, and after

The interview is critical. While good credentials and a great resume 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 in face-to-face 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.

Types of interviews

For executive positions (manager, administrator), the most common interview is with the full governing body. For staff positions (assistant, department head, analyst), it is likely to be with a group of managers and employees. Interview panels may include members of the executive management team, representatives of the business or residential community, a neighboring local government administrator, a local school district administrator, or others. Besides the full group, you may also spend some time individually with each member of the interview panel. You may also be offered a tour with a staff member and, especially for senior positions, you may be invited to a staff or community reception.

Some employers may utilize tools other than a standard interview process. These tools may include 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 resume, role play, and team problem solving. Assessors observe candidate behaviors and assess their skills in oral communication, interpersonal interactions, problem solving/decision making, planning/organizing, and leadership.

In a standard interview, you'll be questioned on 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.

Preparing for the interview

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

- Review available information regarding the local government.
- Make personal contacts 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.
- Prepare answers to potential interview questions.
- Plan your schedule so you will be rested and engaged at the interview.

Gathering information If you haven't already done so, get as much information as practical on the community or jurisdiction, the organization, and the current and future issues and challenges. Research key individuals in the organization, their backgrounds, and their stance on issues. You may obtain this information from the government's Web site and agendas/minutes, the Internet, and newspapers.

Personal contacts Consider contacting individuals who are current or former employees of the organization. This may include the incumbent and key staff members. You may also consider contacting local business leaders, the school superintendent, the Chamber of Commerce, and individuals in neighboring jurisdictions. In addition, the state association and ICMA Range Riders and Senior Advisors can be excellent sources of information.

Assess your personal assets To prepare for the interview, thoroughly review your resume and career goals. Assess your technical competencies and skills, what you do well (and poorly), and where you've succeeded and failed. Be prepared to draw parallels between your background and past experiences and that 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.

Your appearance should reflect taste, sound judgment, and attention to details—attributes that any interviewer should find reassuring. Be careful not to underdress or overdress. Underdressing can signal to others that you lack sophistication, that you don't care about your personal appearance, or that you don't consider the interview very important. Overdressing can suggest that you value "style over substance," that you are not in touch with local traditions and preferences, or even that you live beyond your means. Deciding on the middle ground is a judgment call based on many factors, such as the interviewers, the region, and the size of the local government. The ideal image is one that leaves the interviewers favorably impressed with your overall appearance without remembering why. Here are some guidelines to follow:

- A conservative appearance is the safest approach in an interview setting. Shades of navy, gray, burgundy, and black are good choices. A suit, sport coat or jacket, and slacks, or a dress are appropriate attire. Ensure that your clothing fits well and is clean and free from excessive wear.
- Details and accessories are important, too. If you plan to carry a briefcase to an interview, consider investing in a good leather one in burgundy, tan, brown, or black. Assess your shoes for wear and scuffing. Pay extra attention to personal grooming. Consider a haircut or style update, makeup, or manicure (gender appropriate). Keep jewelry, perfume, or cologne to a minimum.

- Your preliminary research should have told you how the employer is likely to react to tattoos, piercings, and other styles that are not considered “mainstream” in much of the U.S. You will need to use your judgment about how to present yourself if any of these are part of your personal “style,” but be prepared for some interviewers to react with their own bias.

Prepare your responses 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. Questions that you should be prepared to answer include:

- 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 do you bring to this organization?

Most of the 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. A list of popular interview questions appears in Appendix D. Set aside focused time to review these interview 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 in the project.

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

Visiting the community

If you have not been able to visit the community before your interview, plan to arrive a day in advance to 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 picking up a recent real estate listing magazine. 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 in the community. 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 in order to ensure that this is an acceptable move for your family as well as for 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 with staff, the council or board, or the community may be scheduled. Your spouse may or may not be included. These receptions are critical parts of the selection process. They are not casual social events. You need to 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. Key words are *approachable*, *interested*, and *professional*. These events provide you an opportunity to show everyone that they would enjoy working with you; that you can do the job; and that you are interested in the community.

Conducting the interview

Your demeanor A confident, professional, personable demeanor is essential to a successful interview. You should consider the following points for the interview itself:

- Be on 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; answer the questions you are asked, providing examples from past experience where appropriate.
- Emphasize your successes, as the single best indicator of future performance is past success. But don’t brag, and don’t 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.
- Avoid smoking even if your interviewers do, and avoid alcoholic beverages.
- Don’t bluff or cover up.

You’re being interviewed because your performance record indicates that you have the skills and talents the employer needs, and you should be projecting 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, present a message. 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 job, 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, board, and staff
- Communicate and work effectively with citizens and advisory groups
- Understand and solve problems.

Finally, be yourself. Trying to anticipate what the interviewer wants and portraying yourself as something or someone that 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, and it gives you an opportunity to demonstrate what you know about the job and the community. In addition, asking questions puts the follow-up interview on a more equal footing. You should prepare a list of questions on the basis of 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 may have an adverse effect on the employer's impressions of you. 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? End the interview by thanking the interviewers for considering you and, if you want the job, say so. 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.

Withdrawing from a selection process

As you proceed through a selection process, you may decide to withdraw for many different reasons. If you decide to withdraw after you have submitted application materials, 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, then it is also polite to call and let them know you are withdrawing.

If you decide to withdraw from the selection process 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 mayor or governing body chair and provide a direct explanation of why you have elected to withdraw. If you're working with an executive recruiter, it is 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

Two possible outcomes

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 just a disappointment. So how can you learn from the experience and prepare for the next round?

First, take time to thank the prospective employer for the opportunity to interview. It will demonstrate your professionalism.

Next, consider asking for constructive feedback from the interviewer or executive recruiter. Ask what you could have done differently during the interview process. What concerns did they have? Were they looking for more experience in budget or finance or did they want an advanced degree? It may be awkward to ask, but the information will be helpful to you in your next interview.

Keep in mind that the interviewer may find it difficult or uncomfortable to provide you with feedback. Perhaps the decision was based on a “gut instinct” that is difficult to explain. You may probe for feedback to a certain extent, but you should also know when to let it go and accept it. Avoid challenging the interviewer, as this behavior won't produce any result other than reinforcing the decision not to hire you. Remember that the ultimate decision to hire an individual comes down to a question of “fit.” If it's not a good fit, you wouldn't have been happy there. Accept the decision and learn from the experience.

Then take a look at your resume and cover letter and determine whether you could improve them. Consider your interview and how you might practice responding to particular questions. If you asked for and received constructive criticism, develop a plan for addressing any areas of weakness.

You should also be prepared to address concerns on the part of your current employer. If you still plan to search 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 in a constructive way. Finally, don't let one negative experience in job interviewing color your next experience. Do your research again, prepare, and enthusiastically approach the next opportunity. As A. J. Cronin once said, “But always, if we have faith, a door will open for us, not perhaps the 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 plan ahead for the "first 100 days" in your new position. If you are actively pursuing other positions, you need to withdraw as a candidate once you have accepted an offer. Under the ICMA Code of Ethics, members may interview for multiple positions and even consider more than one offer. But once a member has accepted a *bona fide* offer, even verbally, he or she is obligated to take the position. If you are the candidate for the manager's position, once you have negotiated and given your verbal acceptance you are committed unless the governing body fails to approve or substantially changes the negotiated employment agreement.

In the event that you are interviewing for multiple positions and the first offer is not your first choice, think carefully before accepting. If you take a position that isn't your first choice, you need to be able to live with the decision for two years. That's the definition of a professional tenure under the Code of Ethics. And the responsibility for conducting due diligence to make sure that the position is a good personal and professional fit rests with you. Inadequately evaluating whether you and your family will thrive in the community by finding the right education, social, employment, or climate conditions, assessing whether you are capable of meeting the organization's challenges, or determining the political culture of the community is 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 they 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.

If you're applying for a manager 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. This also allows you to deal on a first-hand basis with any objections or concerns that might surface.

Questions that you will want to consider when attending a follow-up interview for any position include the following:

- Are your responsibilities defined clearly? Do you feel that you're up to the challenge, or do you feel that you would be in over your head?
- What opportunities and challenges are available to you in the future?
- Will you be given an opportunity to continue your professional development and to participate in training programs?

Reference checks and background investigations

Reference checks Although the prospective employer may have made some inquiries earlier, by this point they 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 supervisor. Also, they may ask to talk to specific coworkers, subordinates, or community members. Alert your references at the appropriate time and ensure that they understand the position for which you are applying and why you are interested in a career change.

If you believe that some of these required references will be negative, then you should alert the prospective employer and explain why. If you do not wish a specific individual contacted, then you should request this and explain why. The information obtained when contacting references is confidential and will not be shared with you.

Background investigations There's a fine line between an extensive reference check and a full background investigation. In addition to the information gathered from reference checks, the background investigation will normally include credit, education, employment, and criminal record verification.

The extent to which background investigations are conducted varies significantly. However, you should anticipate that a background investigation will be conducted before you are offered the position. Typically, you will be asked to sign a release permitting the investigation. 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 citizens.

In the event of a full background investigation that involves a community visit, 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.

Media relations

If you're applying for a position as chief executive or chief administrative officer of a community, you can expect media interest. At some point in the selection process, the names of the candidates will be publicly released and the media may contact you directly with questions and may ask other individuals and/or your current employer for information about you. The media may cover some of the interviews if they are conducted in public. Once your name becomes public, you should expect to be contacted by the media in your current community.

If you're contacted by a media representative, you should verify what information is public. Thus, if a reporter tells you he or she understands you're an applicant for a certain position, and if you have not been informed that the names are public, you should first contact the representative of the future employer to verify that the names are indeed public.

If your name is public, you need to create a positive relationship with the media as in all other situations. You will need to provide straightforward answers to questions while at the same time ensuring that you are treating both your potential and your current employer with professional courtesy and respect. Also, you should recognize that the potential future employer may consider any information that appears in the public media as they make the hiring decision.

Once you're informed that candidates' names will be public, you may wish to talk briefly with the employer or the recruitment firm about how they would like you to interact with the media and what comments they would like you to share. However, in all your dealings with the media, you should take a professional approach and ensure that the information is accurate and truthful.

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 the ICMA Code of Ethics reminds members seeking a management position to "show professional respect for persons formerly 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 in order to be appointed to a position." As one seasoned city manager advised, "Don't jump the gun or dance on the grave of your predecessors."

Negotiating compensation

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 there is no recruiter, be sure that you provide everyone at the follow-up interview with a list of your current fringe benefits and salary history. No one is going to reasonably expect you to work for less than you currently earn. You may not get everything you want, but the odds are that you'll end up with a better compensation package if you negotiate firmly rather than accept the first offer.

The relationship between a 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 should be viewed as a total package, not as salary alone.

Compensation negotiations can be tense. Governing body members negotiating with a 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, a 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 they'll 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.

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 ties back to the early stages of the recruitment where 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 highest-paid staff member
- The current salary of the applicant (although this may not be fair given that salaries may vary greatly based on housing costs 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 cost of living and housing
- Employment opportunities for a spouse or partner at his or her current compensation level
- The perceived stability or volatility of the position
- A desire to lock in compensation at the higher end of the salary range, as raises may be limited in the future.

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 factors that you will need to lead a satisfying life. Negotiating for a good compensation package makes sense. 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 problems to these pressures, you do nothing but diminish your ability to perform at peak efficiency. 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.

ICMA has a [Model Employment Agreement](#) for managers, accompanied by tips for negotiating in the JobCenter. Some states have developed model agreements based on the ICMA agreement but tailored to the state; check with your state association.

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 their time, however, and be diligent in your evaluation of the offer. Provide a response as promptly as possible.

How does negotiating get underway?

An effective and desirable way to initiate negotiation discussions is for the candidate to provide a written, easily understandable copy of his or her current salary and benefits. It's critical to focus everyone's attention on your current compensation package and what you expect to receive in the new position. 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 who 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 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 E).

Generally, neither the employing body nor the candidate is particularly adept or skilled in the art of negotiation, and often there's a general feeling of awkwardness about "getting down to terms." For that reason, the candidate must be prepared to take the initiative in introducing and guiding the negotiation discussion. In the case of 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. Quite often, this may be the first such 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 the candidate be a good "explainer" as well as a good listener throughout the negotiation discussions. What may appear to be resistance to a particular benefit may stem from misunderstanding, not from 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. In addition, NACo (the National Association of Counties), NACA (the National Association of County Administrators), 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 makes available [salaries of managers \\$50,000 and over](#). By using these sources, you can acquaint the appointing authority with the practices of other municipalities, provide discussion checklists, and emphasize the importance of committing to writing the final determination of the negotiation process—a businesslike action that clarifies for all involved exactly what conditions were agreed on. 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 negotiation process by providing the employing governing body with information about employment and appointment practices and expectations. Having such information in advance helps the employer relate in a more informal and positive manner to the candidate's comments or requests regarding salary or benefits. Information presented by a recruiter need not restrict 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 will prevail. The advice to "be yourself," found in all phases of the recruitment and selection process, 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 to bargain for a salary increase based on performance. In most cases, public sentiment and the political ceiling on salaries prohibit large salary increases.

Keys to successful negotiations and contracts

- 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 advisor.
- For a senior position, involve your personal attorney in the review of any employment agreement.

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 initial 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 to pay.
- Do attempt to get 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., high state income tax, a "requirement" to live in a certain area, and 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 based on 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 the union.
- 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 discussion.
- Don't boast to anyone about your superior negotiating skills or about how you "out-did" 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 a relatively long and arduous task for all involved. Following their interviews of the candidates, most employers are disposed toward making 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.

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 the question of appointment commitment: "Members who accept an appointment to a position should not fail to report for that position. This does not preclude the possibility of a member considering several offers or seeking several positions at the same time, but once a *bona fide* offer of a position has been accepted, that commitment should be honored. Oral acceptance of an employment offer is considered binding unless the employer makes fundamental changes in terms of employment."

Remember, too that the Code requires a member to commit to a position for a minimum of two years except under very unusual circumstances. This applies not only to managers but to members who accept assistant, analyst, or other local government positions. So when you offer that handshake you should stop pursuing any other positions you may have applied for, and you should know enough about the conditions of employment to make a two-year commitment.

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

The written agreement

Written agreements vary in form. For staff positions and positions below the department head level, a letter of agreement outlining the terms of employment and compensation often suffices. For senior positions, a more formal employment agreement is recommended. The career of a city or county manager is often volatile; in some cases his or her job security is at risk with each meeting of the governing body. 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 an agreement with 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. The ICMA [Model Employment Agreement](#) includes a severance provision of one year during which salary and many benefits would continue after termination.

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 with 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. 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 helping 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, based on meetings with other staff involved. This plan will help others in the organization keep things moving and will provide a useful orientation for the next person in your position.

You can see an example of a [formal transition plan](#) prepared by city manager Roger Kemp on the ICMA Web site. Here are some examples of the topics it covers:

- Council/board leadership briefing topics
- Major pending projects
- Legislative priorities (local and state levels)
- Customer service
- Appointments (interim assignments to represent the municipality)
- State and federal grants
- Capital improvement program
- Revenue options
- Economic development options
- Budget expenditure forecasts (particularly for volatile areas)
- Department performance objectives
- Collaborative plans with other municipalities
- Summary of municipal accomplishments during tenure

Other suggestions:

- Try to 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 when you give notice 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 in part blamed on you. Be thick-skinned; responding will only aggravate the situation.

The "first 100 days"

Everyone has his or her own style and may approach the first 100 days in a new job differently, and several examples are cited here. See the accompanying sidebar on "The First 100 Days on the Job" and the article ["Your First Year on the Job: Conceptualizing New Directions"](#) by George Caravalho.

The following suggestions are offered for the manager to consider, depending on his or her leadership style, the community culture, and the situation that exists when he or she arrives. Obviously, if the governing body fired the last manager there is a clear expectation for change. Change may also be needed if you're replacing a 20-year manager who retires, but the way in which you approach that change may be very different. Good luck!!!

- When you move into the manager role, most people in the organization assume there will be change. This assumption gives you latitude, but it also creates an expectation.
- The elected officials, community, and employees are looking for you to effectively communicate direction, establish organizational goals, say what is important, and connect with them personally.
- To meet these expectations, you must make yourself highly visible, meet one-on-one with community leaders, elected officials, and employee groups. Listen to concerns, frustrations, desires, goals, and needs to help you form your plan of action.
- At the same time, take care not to become overbooked. While it's very important to build relationships and address immediate issues, it's equally important to focus on your long-term goals and to implement steps necessary for you to be able to achieve them.
- You also need to understand the culture of the organization, its history, values, and norms. Your ability to reach your long-term goal will be significantly affected by the community culture.
- Show courage and confidence. You will likely have to make important decisions early in your tenure. Don't be pressured into a decision, but use your leadership skills to collect information and confidently make a decision. Establish yourself as one who breaks through backlogs, gets results, and is willing to make tough decisions. Dealing with tough decisions early sends a clear message and encourages others to take action. It is important for you to communicate that message.
- Call attention to early successes that align with what you have prioritized. Communicate and celebrate the initiative.

- Set the tone that "results matter"—but so do employees. You can be tough but caring. An effective leader links performance and results to the human side of work. Eliminate the fears that may follow your decisive action. Engage your staff to create a shared vision. You can take action to build rapport and confidence within your first 100 days.
- Mark the one-year point on your calendar and set this as a benchmark for your long-term goals. This will help you understand what needs to begin immediately for you to be successful. Communicate your long-term goals and make sure they align with your staff's focus.

If all goes well, you should begin to have a sense of accomplishment at the one-year point if not before. You will be on your way to a successful tenure in your new position—and all the work you invested in job hunting will have paid off!

Career checklist the first 100 days on the job

Here are some tips on what you can do to make a successful transition to a new public sector job.

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 the local newspaper before day one, and read old clippings for a sense of history.
- Accept *all* speaking invitations. (Use a phrase or technique that will make your topic memorable as well as significant.)
- List your home phone number in the phone book.
- Develop a list of community activists, and contact each of them personally.
- Attend a wide range of civic events.
- Initiate regular meetings with the media.
- Develop a way to evaluate how the citizens view your position and local government operations.
- Volunteer to serve on a civic board, the Cancer Society, the United Way, or other public service organization.
- Observe projects and problems at first hand.

Take care of your organization

- Meet the employees in their workplaces.
- Spend time with your administrative assistant.
- Insist on performance evaluations both for yourself and for your department directors.
- Attend the meetings of citizen advisory boards and commissions.

- Thoroughly familiarize yourself with the annual budget document and the 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 . . ."
- Insist on seeing a written employment agreement or a letter of understanding *before* you accept the job.

Take care of yourself

- Have a clear idea of why you wanted to make the job change and of how this opportunity helps you meet your needs.
- Never accept a position unless your family has seen the new community.
- Use your network to obtain background information on your community.
- 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.
- Move the family only once.
- Become accessible and involved.
- Reestablish your personal support networks as soon as possible.

Offered by James Bacon, Jr., when he was city manager, Decatur, Illinois

Appendix A: Practices for effective local government management

1. Staff effectiveness: Promoting the development and performance of staff and employees throughout the organization (requires knowledge of interpersonal relations; skill in motivation techniques; ability to identify others' strengths and weaknesses). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **Coaching/mentoring:** Providing direction, support, and feedback to enable others to meet their full potential (requires knowledge of feedback techniques; ability to assess performance and identify others' developmental needs)
- **Team leadership:** Facilitating teamwork (requires knowledge of team relations; ability to direct and coordinate group efforts; skill in leadership techniques)
- **Empowerment:** Creating a work environment that encourages responsibility and decision making at all organizational levels (requires skill in sharing authority and removing barriers to creativity)
- **Delegating:** Assigning responsibility to others (requires skill in defining expectations, providing direction and support, and evaluating results)

2. Policy facilitation: Helping elected officials and other community actors identify, work toward, and achieve common goals and objectives (requires knowledge of group dynamics and political behavior; skill in communication, facilitation, and consensus-building techniques; ability to engage others in identifying issues and outcomes). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **Facilitative leadership:** Building cooperation and consensus among and within diverse groups, helping them identify common goals and act effectively to achieve them; recognizing interdependent relationships and multiple causes of community issues and anticipating the consequences of policy decisions (requires knowledge of community actors and their interrelationships)
- **Facilitating council effectiveness:** Helping elected officials develop a policy agenda that can be implemented effectively and that serves the best interests of the community (requires knowledge of role/authority relationships between elected and appointed officials; skill in responsibly following the lead of others when appropriate; ability to communicate sound information and recommendations)
- **Mediation/negotiation:** Acting as a neutral party in the resolution of policy disputes (requires knowledge of mediation/negotiation principles; skill in mediation/negotiation techniques)

3. Functional and operational expertise and planning: Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **Functional/operational expertise:** Understanding the basic principles of service delivery in functional areas--e.g., public safety, community and economic development, human and social services, administrative services, public works (requires knowledge of service areas and delivery options)

- **Operational planning:** Anticipating future needs, organizing work operations, and establishing timetables for work units or projects (requires knowledge of technological advances and changing standards; skill in identifying and understanding trends; skill in predicting the impact of service delivery decisions)
- 4. Citizen service:** Determining citizen needs and providing responsive, equitable services to the community (requires skill in assessing community needs and allocating resources; knowledge of information gathering techniques)
- 5. Performance measurement/management and quality assurance:** Maintaining a consistently high level of quality in staff work, operational procedures, and service delivery (requires knowledge of organizational processes; ability to facilitate organizational improvements; ability to set performance/ productivity standards and objectives and measure results)
- 6. Initiative, risk taking, vision, creativity, and innovation:** Setting an example that urges the organization and the community toward experimentation, change, creative problem solving, and prompt action (requires knowledge of personal leadership style; skill in visioning, shifting perspectives, and identifying options; ability to create an environment that encourages initiative and innovation). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:
- **Initiative and risk-taking:** Demonstrating a personal orientation toward action and accepting responsibility for the results; resisting the status quo and removing stumbling blocks that delay progress toward goals and objectives
 - **Vision:** Conceptualizing an ideal future state and communicating it to the organization and the community
 - **Creativity and innovation:** Developing new ideas or practices; applying existing ideas and practices to new situations
- 7. Technological literacy:** Demonstrating an understanding of information technology and ensuring that it is incorporated appropriately in plans to improve service delivery, information sharing, organizational communication, and citizen access (requires knowledge of technological options and their application)
- 8. Democratic advocacy and citizen participation:** Demonstrating a commitment to democratic principles by respecting elected officials, community interest groups, and the decision making process; educating citizens about local government; and acquiring knowledge of the social, economic, and political history of the community (requires knowledge of democratic principles, political processes, and local government law; skill in group dynamics, communication, and facilitation; ability to appreciate and work with diverse individuals and groups and to follow the community's lead in the democratic process). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:
- **Democratic advocacy:** Fostering the values and integrity of representative government and local democracy through action and example; ensuring the effective participation of local government in the intergovernmental system (requires knowledge and skill in intergovernmental relations)
 - **Citizen participation:** Recognizing the right of citizens to influence local decisions and promoting active citizen involvement in local governance
- 9. Diversity:** Understanding and valuing the differences among individuals and fostering these values throughout the organization and the community

10. Budgeting: Preparing and administering the budget (requires knowledge of budgeting principles and practices, revenue sources, projection techniques, and financial control systems; skill in communicating financial information)

11. Financial analysis: Interpreting financial information to assess the short-term and long-term fiscal condition of the community, determine the cost-effectiveness of programs, and compare alternative strategies (requires knowledge of analytical techniques and skill in applying them)

12. Human resources management: Ensuring that the policies and procedures for employee hiring, promotion, performance appraisal, and discipline are equitable, legal, and current; ensuring that human resources are adequate to accomplish programmatic objectives (requires knowledge of personnel practices and employee relations law; ability to project workforce needs)

13. Strategic planning: Positioning the organization and the community for events and circumstances that are anticipated in the future (requires knowledge of long-range and strategic planning techniques; skill in identifying trends that will affect the community; ability to analyze and facilitate policy choices that will benefit the community in the long run)

14. Advocacy and interpersonal communication: Facilitating the flow of ideas, information, and understanding between and among individuals; advocating effectively in the community interest (requires knowledge of interpersonal and group communication principles; skill in listening, speaking, and writing; ability to persuade without diminishing the views of others). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **Advocacy:** Communicating personal support for policies, programs, or ideals that serve the best interests of the community
- **Interpersonal communication:** Exchanging verbal and nonverbal messages with others in a way that demonstrates respect for the individual and furthers organizational and community objectives (requires ability to receive verbal and nonverbal cues; skill in selecting the most effective communication method for each interchange)

15. Presentation skills: Conveying ideas or information effectively to others (requires knowledge of presentation techniques and options; ability to match presentation to audience)

16. Media relations: Communicating information to the media in a way that increases public understanding of local government issues and activities and builds a positive relationship with the press (requires knowledge of media operations and objectives)

17. Integrity: Demonstrating fairness, honesty, and ethical and legal awareness in personal and professional relationships and activities (requires knowledge of business and personal ethics; ability to understand issues of ethics and integrity in specific situations). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **Personal integrity:** Demonstrating accountability for personal actions; conducting personal relationships and activities fairly and honestly
- **Professional integrity:** Conducting professional relationships and activities fairly, honestly, legally, and in conformance with the ICMA Code of Ethics (requires knowledge of administrative ethics and specifically the ICMA Code of Ethics)
- **Organizational integrity:** Fostering ethical behavior throughout the organization through personal example, management practices, and training (requires knowledge of administrative

ethics; ability to instill accountability into operations; and ability to communicate ethical standards and guidelines to others)

18. Personal development: Demonstrating a commitment to a balanced life through ongoing self-renewal and development in order to increase personal capacity (includes maintaining personal health, living by core values; continuous learning and improvement; and creating interdependent relationships and respect for differences).

Appendix B: Sample resume

Joanne Parks

6112 Friendly Court
Sunnytown, CA 96058

(499) 555-2745 (work); (449) 555-5472 (home); (449) 555-5382 (mobile)
jparks@sunnytown.com

SUMMARY

Management professional with strategic planning and operational expertise; proven leadership qualities in the areas of human resources, budgeting, communications, project management, capital improvement planning, intergovernmental relations, and economic development.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

City Manager **September 1997-Present**
City of Sunnytown, CA

A suburb of Pleasantville, Sunnytown has a diverse population of 50,000. A full-service City, the organization has 320 employees and a \$70 million budget. Issues relate to growth, economic development, transportation, and aging infrastructure. Appointed by a 5-member City Council, oversee day-to-day operations and serve as Executive Director for the Sunnytown Redevelopment Agency.

Key Accomplishments:

- Initiated first personnel department including citywide training, employee assistance, tuition reimbursement, and pay-for-performance programs.
- Expanded the use of technology through geographic information systems, and computer technology for police, fire and emergency vehicles.
- Negotiated with three separate bargaining units for two-year MOU's.
- Enhanced relationships with regional agencies and Chamber of Commerce.
- Completed construction of \$1.8 million equestrian center, generating substantial revenue annually for the general fund.

Assistant City Manager **August 1991-August 1997**
City of Pleasantville, CA

With a population of over 80,000, Pleasantville employed 450 staff and had an operating budget of \$110 million. Reporting to the City Manager, oversaw the general administration of human resources, information technology, budget and finance divisions with four direct reports.

Joanne Parks
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Key Accomplishments:

- Improved customer service and promoted more accessible government by establishing City-wide newsletter. Oversaw installation of voice mail, audio agenda, and Internet information systems.
- Prepared and managed four consecutive municipal budgets. Facilitated goal-setting and zero-base budget review.

Economic Development Manager
City of Lone Tree, NV

June 1988-July 1991

Lone Tree is a suburb of Las Vegas with a growing population of 12,000. Reporting to the City Manager, oversaw department budget of \$1.3 million and two staff members in the attraction and retention of industrial businesses to bedroom community.

Key Accomplishments:

- Development of local legislation establishing the City's economic development policy and financial incentive program designed to assist basic industrial businesses.
- Development and implementation of economic revitalization strategies in cooperation with various City department and outside organizations.

Management Analyst I and II, Economic Development
City of Golden Leaves, CO

September 1985-May 1988

A suburb of Denver, Golden Leaves has a population of 20,000. Reporting to the Economic Development Manager, held progressively responsible positions overseeing analysis and documentation of economic development policy and incentive programs.

EDUCATION

Master of Public Administration, May 1985
University of Denver, CO

Bachelor of Arts, Police Science, May 1983
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

International City/County Management Association
National Council for Urban Economic Development
City Managers Department of League of California Cities

Appendix C: Sample cover letter

October 3, 2005

Mayor Carver E. Richardson
and Members of the City Council
City of Bellewood
419 Jackson Avenue
Bellewood, TX 76010

Dear Mayor Richardson and Council Members:

Please consider this letter and resume as an application for the position of City Manager with the City of Bellewood. I have reviewed the position profile and have conducted research on the community and believe this to be a fit.

For the past eight years, I have served as the City Manager of Sunnyside, California, a community of approximately 50,000 residents. During this period of time, I have implemented a successful budget retrenchment program, initiated a comprehensive economic development program, and put in place the most aggressive capital improvement program in the history of the community. I understand a number of these skills are applicable to the Bellewood City Manager position.

While working for a fiscally conservative City Council, I have also had the opportunity to improve employee productivity, reduce per capita service costs, develop a staff evaluation program, and implement a performance budget. In addition, I have served in a variety of functional areas, including human resources, finance, and economic development.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to call me. I sincerely look forward to hearing from you and am most interested in this position.

Sincerely,

Joanne Parks

Appendix D: 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, council members, county board, staff, employees, and citizens?
 - 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's 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 citizens?
 - 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 council, 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 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, council committees, the individual council members, citizens, 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 city government and community image?
 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 citizens and citizen groups?
 15. What do you consider are 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 E: Compensation checklist

Benefit	Current employer	Recommended	Agreed
Employment agreement	One-year notice	Same	6 months
Salary	\$60,000	\$66,000	\$65,000
Pension	Employee contributes 5%	No participation	OK
Deferred compensation	Employer contributes 7%	12%	12%
Automobile	Leased full-size; personal use	Same	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
Physical	Executive	Same	OK
Vacation	Three weeks	Same allowable 1st year	2 wks 1st year 3 wks 2nd year
Sick leave	68 days	30 credit	OK
Business expense	All reasonable	Same	OK
Conference	State, national	Same	OK
Moving		Total	OK
House-hunting trip		Two with spouse	One
Relocation		City purchase	\$5,000 relocation payment