



GUIDELINES FOR RECRUITING A CITY MANAGER

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2022 TEXAS CITY
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION GUIDE

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GUIDELINES FOR RECRUITING A CITY MANAGER



TEXAS CITY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

INTRODUCTION

Selecting a city manager is one of the most important decisions made by a city council.

Please note that “city council” as used in these guidelines refers to the mayor and council and their roles as outlined in the city charter, administrative procedures policy, and general laws as applicable.

- While the city council provides policy and political leadership for the city, the city manager is responsible for implementing policy and providing the administrative leadership necessary for continued progress and employee morale.
- To a great extent, as a resource to the city council, the city manager will make the difference between whether or not city council objectives and priorities are identified, defined, considered, and implemented.

El Paso has had 2 City Managers since it changed its form of Government to a Council-Manager form of Government in 2004.



The hiring process for a city manager must be deliberate and not impulsive.



RECRUITMENT FIRST STEPS

While resources are available to assist, the more important considerations for those making the hiring decision are:

- Know what you are looking for when recruiting to fill a vacant city manager position.
- Remember that recruiting a city manager is a two-way street, and the city has a responsibility to present the position attractively, show interest in the applicants, and be competitive.
- Be sure the recruiting process is well organized and coordinated from the outset.
- Don't lose control of the recruitment process or the hiring decision to others such as search firms, employee groups, community groups, other elected officials, etc.
- Involve people in the recruitment process who are knowledgeable of local government and how the council-manager form of government works.”

RECRUITMENT FIRST STEPS

To ensure that the recruitment is off to a good start and interim management is in place, follow the steps in Table I.

Table I -- City Council's First Steps When Vacancy Becomes Known and Prior to the Recruitment

1. Act promptly but deliberatively to announce the vacancy and recruitment timetable.
2. Meet to plan for the recruitment process.
3. Appoint an interim city manager.
4. Obtain status report on current problems and important projects.
5. Defer key actions where possible for the new city manager.

PARTICIPANTS OF SELECTION PROCESS

- **CITY COUNCIL- CREATE FRAMEWORK**
- **CITY STAFF- ASSIGN KEY STAFF TO ASSIST SEARCH FIRM**
- **CITIZENS COMMITTEE-** If desired by the city council and structured properly, it is possible for citizens to play a role in the process.

While citizen involvement can play an important role in recruitment, two cautions must be noted:

1. The city council must not lose control in terms of making the final decision, so that candidates do not receive the impression that they are being hired by a committee as opposed to the city council itself.
2. Most often the public does not fully understand the job of the city manager especially how it relates to the city council, how government works, the complexity of the public policy arena with multiple diverging perspectives, etc. So, the public's preferences should not trump the council's preferences.

TIMING

The timing of a city manager recruitment can sometimes be affected by publication deadlines which are important in terms of properly advertising the vacant position.

- **Deadline for submitting resumes: An ideal timeline would provide 30 - 60 days from the start of the recruitment**
- **Applicant Review: 30 - 60 days to review resumes, have interviews, conduct background checks, and make a selection**
- **After Selections: Minimum of 30 - 45 days for the new city manager to relocate to the city.**

Overall, the recruitment should move forward in an expeditious way, allowing adequate time for a thorough and comprehensive process.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Because no one is an expert in all areas, and because city managers have various backgrounds and experiences, it is important for the city council to reach a general consensus on competencies, experience, education level, skills the new city manager should possess and objectives that they will look to him/her to achieve.

By reaching a general consensus on selection guidelines/criteria, the parameters can be used in three ways during the recruitment process:

1. **For advertising the position and responding to applicant's questions about the position and the process;**
2. **For the selection criteria when reviewing the resumes, evaluating the interviewees, and conducting reference checks; and**
3. **For assessing the performance of the new city manager after he/she is hired and on the job.**

COMPENSATION

A final item to be considered at the outset of the recruitment is compensation. While it is important for the city council to have some general understanding of the salary parameters, it is also important that the council leave itself some flexibility in this area.

- Some city councils leave salary open, commensurate with background and experience. From a practical standpoint, every city has political or other limits in terms of compensation, and this can be taken into account by reviewing the current salary of applicants at the time finalists are selected.
- Another approach to consider is listing the current city manager's salary or the proposed salary range, while stating the salary is negotiable. For determining a salary range, the TML has an annual survey of salaries and benefits provided for 27 positions in Texas cities, including the position of city manager.



CITY MANAGERS SALARIES OF TEXAS CITIES

TML SURVEY RESPONDENTS (6-18)

	City	Population	Region	Job Title	Number of Employees in Position	FLSA Exemption	Level Position Best Aligns	Annual Actual Base Salary	Entry Date
1*	San Antonio	1,452,000	San Antonio	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt		\$ 444,761.00	10/10/2022
2*	Dallas	1,288,000	Dallas	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt		\$ 423,000.00	8/30/2022
3*	Austin	964,177	Austin	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt		\$ 388,190.40	12/4/2022
4*	Fort Worth	958,692	Fort Worth	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt		\$ 354,326.00	1/5/2022
5*	Arlington	392,786	Arlington	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt		\$ 323,836.00	1/5/2022
6	Garland	242,507	13-North Central Texas-Dallas	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt	Director	\$ 351,500.00	2/4/2022
7	Frisco	216,338	13-North Central Texas-Dallas	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt	Director	\$ 286,513.00	2/4/2022
8	Amarillo	201,234	02-Amarillo	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt	Director	\$ 294,000.00	1/31/2023
9	Grand Prairie	197,590	13-North Central Texas-Dallas	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Non-Exempt	Director	\$ 289,500.00	3/23/2022
10	Killeen	156,261	09-Heart of Texas-Waco Area	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt	Director	\$ 216,300.00	2/24/2021
11	Pasadena	153,887	14-San Jacinto-Houston Area	Chief of Staff	1	Exempt	Director	\$ 225,440.00	3/18/2021
12	Mesquite	150,184	13-North Central Texas-Dallas	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt	Director	\$ 271,425.00	1/31/2023
13	Waco	141,377	09-Heart of Texas-Waco Area	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt		\$ 279,460.00	3/16/2022
14	Carrollton	139,892	13-North Central Texas-Dallas	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt	Director	\$ 295,955.00	1/31/2023
15	Lewisville	132,620	08-Where the West Begins-Fort Worth	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt	Director	\$ 280,000.00	2/10/2022
16	Allen	109,379	13-North Central Texas-Dallas	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt		\$ 260,000.00	2/14/2022
17	Wichita Falls	106,876	05-Red River Valley-Wichita Falls	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt	Director	\$ 247,146.00	2/2/2023
18	Edinburg	102,483	12-Lower Rio Grande Valley	City Manager/ Administrator	1	Exempt		\$ 265,000.00	2/9/2022



The Avg. salary for the top 5 City Managers listed: \$386,822.68
The Avg. salary for the City Managers listed: \$305,352.91

1* Source San Antonio Express News
2* Source: The Dallas Express News
3* Source: KXAN News
4* Source: KTSM News
5* Source: KTSM News

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Table III – Steps for conducting a comprehensive recruitment process:

1. The position should be well defined in the city council's recruitment criteria.
2. The position should be effectively advertised.
3. As a supplement to the advertising process, outstanding potential candidates should be identified and invited to apply.
4. All resumes should be acknowledged, and applicants should be notified regarding the status and timing of the recruitment.
5. Resumes should be carefully reviewed against criteria developed by the city council, and backgrounds of leading applicants should be thoroughly examined, with work-related references as a basis for selecting finalists.
6. A selection process consisting of interviews, background and reference assessments, exercises designed to assess the full range of skills and personal attributes required, or similar technique should be used as a basis for making a hiring decision.
7. A total compensation package should be negotiated, and all terms and conditions of employment placed in writing.

RECRUITMENT ALTERNATIVES

It is important for the city council to determine WHO will be responsible for conducting the recruitment of a new city manager.

Three alternatives are available:

1. **The city conducts the recruitment in-house** using the city council, city staff such as the human resources (HR) department, and/or interim city manager or some combination thereof.
 - If this alternative is selected, it should be with the understanding that it is time consuming and requires someone on the city council or in the city organization who has both the time, capacity, and skill to do the necessary tasks.
2. **The city council outsources the recruitment.** Most outsourcing means contracting with a firm that specializes in providing executive search assistance to cities.
 - A recruiting firm offers a broader array of services and resources than an in-house HR department can, which includes an existing network of potential candidates, a marketing/media presence, and a specialized niche that standard HR departments can't offer.
3. **The city council uses a hybrid approach** conducting the recruitment and retaining someone to assist at certain points in the process.
 - This means that the city council is responsible for conducting the recruitment, but with assistance from an executive recruitment firm or similar resource.

SELECTION PROCESS

Once the deadline for submitting resumes has passed, the selection process begins. Principal steps in the selection process include reviewing resumes and determining finalists, interviews with finalists, and post-interview activities.

There are several methods used in the selection process to screen applicants, and these include biographical data [as in the resume and/or application], reference letters, aptitude tests, assessment centers, background checks, social media, and interviews, both face-to-face (face-to-face) and virtual.

Each method has its pros and cons, but all have their limitations so there should be no dependence upon a single method.

Table IV below provides an indication of the strengths of standard selection methods as reflected in their validity

Table IV -- Comparison of Selection Methods (Arvey and Faley 1993)

Method	Validity	Reliability	Cost
1. Biographical Data	Moderate	High	Low
2. Reference Letters	Low	Low	Low
3. Aptitude Tests	Low	Moderate	Low
4. Assessment Center	Moderate	High	High
5. Interviews	Low	Low	High

DIVERSITY

Even though the recruitment process may have successfully achieved a large, diversified applicant pool, this is not sufficient if the participants in the selection process are not also representative of the community demographically.

Below are five key recommendations to help your community maximize the talent pool:

1. Connect with a variety of advertising opportunities to ensure your position is advertised widely, including partner and affinity organizations related to the national or state associations of managers
2. Collect recruitment demographics on your applicant pool, and analyze to ensure you have a cross-section of experiences and backgrounds included— consider a blind screening process for your initial resume review
3. Aim for a roster of finalists that includes representation of race, ethnicity, and gender proportionality similar to your community's makeup— review your recruiting process to see where there may be gaps
4. Develop a list of screening questions that can be applied equitably across all finalists, regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender
5. Ensure that your hiring panel is diverse and includes a variety of backgrounds and 54 perspectives; if your council or commission is lacking in diversity, consider expanding your panel to include community residents, business, and civil society representatives.

IN-HOUSE APPLICANTS

- In addition to resumes that are submitted in response to advertisements or invitations to apply, the city council may receive applications from current city employees who want to be considered.
- The city's advertising program should ensure that city employees are aware of the opportunity and know how and when to apply. It may be that the city council will even want to invite one or more employees to submit a resume.
- It is important that in-house applicants be treated in the same manner as other applicants. In this regard, it should be made clear that if an in-house applicant is ultimately selected as city manager, it is only because the city council felt he/she was the best choice.

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

Depending upon circumstances, a city can receive in excess of 75 resumes for a vacant city manager position. The review of resumes will take time, so guidelines need to be developed to assist in narrowing the total to a smaller group for further investigation.

Unless the city council has retained an executive recruiting firm, there are at least three alternatives, and the city staff could be involved in all three:

1. Give each council member a fixed period of time to review all resumes, and to recommend a smaller number for further consideration. Someone on the city council should then act as a coordinator to group the common choices together, and to resolve whether those who were not picked by the majority of the city council will receive further consideration.
2. Ask a committee of the city council to assume responsibility for the application review process, and to ultimately recommend a group of finalists to the city council.
3. Use an outside third party such as a retired and respected city manager, university professor with city management experience, etc. to help screen the resumes and narrow them down as far as the basic criteria – e.g., years of experience, amount of education, types of competencies, etc. Or, let the city's HR director perform the initial screenings so that the city council will not have to review all the resumes received.

FINALISTS

When the resume review process has been completed, it should be possible to narrow the total group of applicants to a smaller second-round group consisting of perhaps 10-15 applicants. This smaller group will be subject to more thorough background checks including references and social media usage history

Background Checks -- When conducting background checks as a basis for narrowing to a group of finalists, several guidelines are important:

- The background checks should be done by the same person to assure consistency.
- Similar areas and questions should be covered with respect to each applicant to provide a good basis for comparison.
- Talk with enough people to get a consistent reading as to the strengths and weaknesses of the individual. If a person can only say good things about the applicant, ask them directly about the applicant's weaknesses.
- Use the background checks as a vehicle to learn about the person's ability to work effectively with people, as well as to develop a more complete understanding of the applicant's work experience and specific accomplishments.

Interviews -- The normal process is for there to be at least two sets of finalists

- the first round would have a much more in-depth screening than the preliminary resume screening, and possibly include short virtual interviews— e.g., 30 minutes -- prior to the final cut.
- A preliminary virtual interview should expedite the screening process by better revealing more about the applicants than the resumes, background checks, etc.

FINALISTS

Based upon the result of the background checks and keeping in mind the city council's selection criteria, the city council should be able to narrow to a smaller group of 3-5 finalists

- Virtual interviews could be used to help narrow the second-round applicants to the final round which will be 3-5 applicants who are the finalists and invited to the city for an interview. *The city may also wish to establish a back-up group in case some of the finalists decide not to pursue the position.*
- The finalist group should be large enough to expose the city council to an array of personalities, diversified applicants, competencies, and skill sets.
- Once finalists have been selected, a representative of the city council should call each finalist and confirm appropriate next steps. Among other things, the city should:
 - Advise each finalist of the nature of the interview process, e.g., virtual and/or face to face; entire council or committee; etc., as well as the date and time. Also confirm how many will be interviewed, whether there are any in-house candidates, and when you expect a decision to be made. Indicate that this will all be confirmed in a follow-up letter.
 - Unless State law or the advice of the city attorney dictates otherwise, assure the applicant that the confidentiality of the process will be maintained. If the names of finalists are to be made public, the applicant should be advised of this, and given the opportunity to withdraw.
 - Indicate that a more complete packet of information about the city will be mailed directly to the applicant's home.



End of Presentation

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