



FLORIDA CITY/COUNTY MANAGER SEARCH GUIDE

October 2024

INTRODUCTION¹

Selecting a city or county manager or administrator² is one of the most important decisions made by a governing body.³ The objective of this guide is to assist local elected officials and staff with the search process.⁴

Recruiting and selecting a new manager can be a very positive, enjoyable, and unifying experience for a governing body. It provides an opportunity for the governing body, as a group, to think together about objectives and priorities as a basis for determining the characteristics of an effective manager for their community.

Like a chief executive officer in a Fortune 500 company, the manager is responsible for serving the governing body, managing the financial aspects of the organization, directing the employees, ensuring quality customer service, and implementing legal and ethical standards. Additionally, as a resource to the governing body, the manager will help determine whether governing body objectives and priorities are appropriately defined, considered, and implemented. Unique to local governments, the manager oversees an organization that is focused on providing a variety of services to the community rather than on making profit.

The position of manager requires a variety of skillsets. Not every person can perform this role. Therefore, selecting the right person for the job is critical to the success of the governing body and of the community.

Recruiting and selecting a new manager provides an opportunity for the governing body to look to the future in a way that is seldom experienced when considering agenda items at a typical governing body meeting.

¹Appreciation is extended to Texas City Management Association (TCMA) for permission to use their 2022 edition of "Guidelines for Recruiting a City Manager."

²"City or county manager or administrator" or similar titles will be referred to as "manager" hereafter.

³"Governing body" as used in these guidelines refers to the mayor/chair and council/commission and their roles as outlined in the city/county charter, administrative procedures policy, and general laws as applicable.

⁴In 2023, the Board of Directors of FCCMA requested that the Senior Advisors prepare a Florida search guide for chief administrative officers. A public/private partnership work group made up of the following members prepared this guide: Jim Hanson, Senior Advisor and Chair; Russ Blackburn, Senior Advisor; Kurt Bressner, Senior Advisor Emeritus; Dan Kleman, Senior Advisor; Carol Russell, FCCMA Association Services Coordinator; Doug Thomas, Executive Vice President of Recruitment & Leadership Development, Strategic Government Services (SGR); Lynn Tipton, FCCMA Director Emeritus; and Heidi Voorhees, President, GovHRUSA, a Division of MGT Consulting of America.

When faced with an upcoming or immediate vacancy in the manager position, the governing body must provide the following:



Strong, consistent political leadership for conducting the recruitment



A well-organized, coordinated and transparent recruitment



A timetable that ensures a prompt, comprehensive recruitment and guards against premature action



A plan for administering the affairs of the city/county while the recruitment is underway

The governing body must act thoughtfully and deliberately in determining how to ensure that operations of the local government are properly managed during the period before a permanent manager is selected and on the job. In some cases, the members of the governing body may agree they have confidence in a specific staff person. Should the governing body determine that there is no one on staff whom it can or wants to appoint as the interim manager, it may decide to retain the services of a retired or in-transition manager.

The governing body should publicly announce the appointment of the interim manager, making clear to all stakeholders that the interim manager is responsible for implementing governing body policy and overseeing operations.

Florida Government in the Sunshine:

Strict compliance with Florida law for all aspects of the search is essential. The position profile or other search documents must clearly advise all potential applicants that their application materials are subject to public disclosure under Florida law. Assurances of confidentiality cannot be provided.

The Florida Constitution prohibits dual office holding, meaning one person cannot hold two positions that both involve exercising sovereign power. For example, an interim manager cannot simultaneously serve as a police chief or as a member of a local planning and zoning board. Consult your city or county attorney for guidance when selecting an interim manager.

This guide will discuss:

1. Steps Prior to Recruitment
2. Responsibility for Recruitment
3. Role of the Outgoing Manager and Guidelines for the Interim Manager
4. Parameters of Recruitment
5. Generation of Candidate Pool
6. Selection

SUMMARY:

Following these six steps will help guide a successful search.

1 STEPS PRIOR TO RECRUITMENT

Prior to recruitment, the governing body, with assistance of staff and possibly the **Florida City and County Management Association** (FCCMA) Senior Advisor Program or the **Florida Association of Counties** (FAC), should:

- Authorize preparation of a concise announcement to the public, the organization and stakeholders regarding the executive vacancy.
- Provide a timetable and option for selection of an interim manager.
- Identify local charter and state statute requirements for the position.
- Review the current job description.
- Identify and agree upon the essential characteristics and criteria of the next manager.
- Obtain a status report on organization and projects.
- Discuss compensation, benefits and employment agreement.
- Discuss housing assistance if residency is required.
- Prepare an outline of a recruitment plan.
- Defer key actions where possible until the new manager arrives.

SUMMARY:

These core elements should be addressed by the governing body at the start of the search.

2

RESPONSIBILITY FOR RECRUITMENT

The governing body is responsible for determining the approach used to conduct the recruitment. Regardless of the process used to recruit and evaluate manager candidates, members of the governing body must be clear that they will approve the selection of final candidates, conduct the interviews, and make the final selection in accordance with the Florida Sunshine Law.

Four search options are summarized here:

1. The governing body conducts the recruitment *in-house* using the elected body members, organization staff (such as the human resources department), the interim city manager (if that person is not a candidate for the permanent position), or some combination of these.
2. The governing body *outsources* the recruitment by contracting with a firm that specializes in providing executive search assistance to cities or counties. Using an executive search firm provides the most comprehensive search.^{5,6}
3. The governing body authorizes a search conducted by the FCCMA Senior Advisor Program or the FAC.⁷
4. The governing body authorizes a *hybrid* approach, conducting the recruitment internally with assistance from the FCCMA Senior Advisor Program or the Florida Association of Counties.

SUMMARY:

Deciding who conducts the recruitment is highly individualized. Considerations include whether the governing body wants to conduct an extensive marketing campaign, has the capacity and willingness to perform all tasks related to recruitment, and/or has a challenging political operating situation that may have an impact on the candidate pool. Having an external, neutral third party assist with the search may be appropriate.

⁵Contact FCCMA staff for a list of Florida-involved search firms or see Exhibit A. "Florida Local Government Executive Search Firms."

⁶See Exhibit B. "Search Firm Services Typically Provided."

⁷The FCCMA Senior Advisor Program search services are limited to cities and towns under 10,000 population and counties under 50,000 population. However, the Senior Advisor Program is available to meet with jurisdictions of any size to assist in finding an interim manager and outlining the scope of a manager search. Specific search services required should be discussed with the FCCMA Senior Advisor Coordinator or the FAC representative.

3

ROLE OF THE OUTGOING MANAGER AND GUIDELINES FOR THE INTERIM MANAGER

The **Code of Ethics for the International City/County Management Association** (ICMA) provides guidance to the role of the outgoing manager in a recruitment as well as guidelines for the interim manager.

ICMA Code of Ethics – Tenet 3:

Demonstrate by word and action the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity in all public, professional, and personal relationships in order that the member may merit the trust and respect of the elected and appointed officials, employees, and the public.⁸

The exiting or retiring manager should refrain from working on the process itself (other than directing necessary staff to do their respective roles) and should maintain an appropriate distance from the governing body as their deliberations proceed.

If appropriate, the outgoing manager may provide insights to candidates.

The interim manager who *is* a candidate for the post must refrain from all involvement in the process, which would be a conflict of interest.

The interim manager who is *not* a candidate for the post may talk with staff about processes and procedures and can assist the elected officials with questions as necessary. Since the incoming manager, in theory, will continue to work with an internal former interim manager, fact-based neutrality as an interim manager should be an overriding principle to guide the level of involvement during the recruitment.

SUMMARY:

All members of ICMA and FCCMA are obligated to follow the ICMA Code of Ethics. Understanding this requirement will help ensure professional management.

⁸The entire ICMA Code of Ethics may be found here: <https://icma.org/page/icma-code-ethics>

4 PARAMETERS OF RECRUITMENT

Prior to starting a search, the governing body should establish the parameters of the recruitment.

PARTICIPANTS IN THE SEARCH:

At the onset of the recruitment, the governing body must address who will be involved in the search. Participants may include the governing body, staff, and/or a citizen committee, if authorized by the governing body.

Staff: The staff role can vary, depending upon whether the governing body, an executive search firm, an FCCMA Senior Advisor, or the FAC is responsible for conducting the recruitment. If the governing body or the FCCMA Senior Advisor Program is conducting the recruitment, staff will often be responsible for placing advertisements and collecting resumes. They may also assist in scheduling interviews. If an executive search firm is involved, the firm may be responsible for all these administrative details. The role of staff in this case is usually limited to providing information about the community and organization and to coordinating generally with the search firm. When an executive search firm is involved, staff often provide additional input to develop the Manager Profile and sometimes are invited to participate in other events during the interview process.

Citizen Engagement: In some instances, governing bodies have involved individual citizens or citizen committees in defining desired characteristics of a new manager and participating in an advisory role in the review leading to the determination of finalists. Committees with these responsibilities must follow Sunshine Law requirements. The participants in the screening should represent a cross section of the community as much as possible.

However, regardless of the type or level of citizen candidate review, only the governing body decides on interview candidates and hires the new manager.

MANAGER PROFILE:

Identifying the desired characteristics and goals for the new manager goes to the heart of the recruitment. A profile can encompass those qualities, characteristics, education, experience, and areas of expertise of the ideal candidate. The profile should also address any residency requirements for the position.

Using the profile as a guide and considering how applicants measure against the established criteria and against one another, the governing body can better ensure that the candidate it appoints has the combination of management experience and leadership style to be successful in the position. Developing the manager profile helps the governing body define its needs and establishes the groundwork for generating a rich pool of applicants with the skills and abilities to address the needs of

the governing body, community, and organization. Additionally, the profile should include information about the attributes of the community, issues it faces, quality of life, and objectives that the new manager should achieve. The governing body has a responsibility to present the position accurately, attractively, and competitively.

In summary, it is vital for the governing body to determine *by consensus* what their community needs, include these needs in the profile, and refer to these needs when considering all candidates' skills and backgrounds. These characteristics and objectives help the governing body identify in detail their ideal manager within the potential candidate pool, review resumes, select finalists, and hire the best "fit" for the community.⁹

COMPENSATION:

While it is important for the governing body to have some general understanding of the salary parameters that will be acceptable, the governing body must also allow itself some flexibility in this area. The governing body can and should obtain comparable data for other cities/counties of similar size in their region.¹⁰ In addition, benefits and housing assistance should be confirmed.

After the Manager Profile has been approved by the governing body, advertising can proceed.¹¹

SCOPE OF RECRUITMENT:

When a manager vacancy is advertised, resumes will usually be received from individuals in different parts of the country. Since the governing body is looking for the best candidate, all resumes received should be reviewed carefully. Some governing bodies will choose to focus on their state or region, thinking that these candidates may have a better understanding and orientation to problems they face, legal issues, financing alternatives, and similar matters. Given the competitive nature of the profession, a nationwide search is recommended.

OUTREACH STRATEGY:

It is advantageous for the governing body to ensure that every professional who might have an interest in the vacant position is aware of the opportunity to apply. In addition to posting the position vacancy in professional publications, websites, social media, and job boards, a brochure describing the community, the position profile, and the governing body's key goals and objectives will enhance the opportunity to attract outstanding candidates.

⁹See Exhibit C. "Sample Manager Profile."

¹⁰See Exhibit D. "Manager Salary and Benefit Information."

¹¹See Exhibit E. "Places to Advertise."

TIMING OF THE SEARCH:

Publication deadlines must be considered to properly advertise a vacant manager position in a timely manner. An ideal search timeline will provide 30 - 60 days from the start of the recruitment to the deadline for submitting resumes; 30 - 60 days to review resumes; 30 days to schedule interviews with candidates, hold interviews, conduct background checks, and select a candidate; and a minimum of 30 - 45 days for the new manager to relocate to the community. The estimated time from start to selection of a new manager is between 90 to 120 days.

SUMMARY:

The governing body should discuss and reach a consensus on each of the above parameters in a public meeting at the outset of the recruitment. This consensus will not only result in a framework for conducting the overall recruitment but also help ensure that the governing body is unified in its approach to the recruitment of a manager. After this consensus has been reached, the recruitment can move forward.

5 GENERATION OF CANDIDATE POOL

The recruitment is distinguished from the selection by focusing on the generation of a sufficient pool of qualified applicants so that the governing body has a reasonable number of applicants to screen. Professionalism, punctuality, and responsiveness during this period of advertising and obtaining applications for the position is key because applicants receive their first impressions of the community and organization during the recruitment phase.

Candidates must not only have technical and administrative skills and experience, but also possess the “non-task-related factors” of the job. The manager’s job has certain well-defined managerial tasks, such as budgeting, supervising, and communicating, which are vital to the organization’s core operations. A manager may carry out well-defined managerial tasks but may be lacking in non-task-related factors, resulting in poor overall performance.

In today’s complex public sector, communities are an ever-increasing mix of races, ethnicities, religions, gender identity, and sexual orientation. It is important for communities to seek out candidates from various backgrounds, cultures, ages, genders and experiences. This not only ensures a fair representation of the community’s population, but also brings in a variety of perspectives and ideas that can contribute to the effective administration of the local government services and can foster innovation, creativity and knowledge. Recruitment goals can be furthered through targeted outreach, social media postings of the vacant position, advertising on a variety of websites that are specific to local government, advertising on websites that serve underrepresented minorities, and generally demonstrating an open and welcoming culture.

SUMMARY:

To effectively recruit, the local government must market the position so that its requirements are clear to potential applicants. The goal of recruitment is to generate a sufficient pool of qualified applicants. To accomplish this, relations with applicants must communicate professionalism and responsiveness as well as provide accurate, descriptive information about the position, the community and the status of the process. The local government can use both outreach and advertising while making sure that both approaches encourage a broad-based candidate pool.

6 SELECTION

After the deadline for submitting resumes has passed, selection begins. Methods used to screen applicants typically include careful review of each candidate’s resume and cover letter, social and print media presence, consideration of reference letters and/or reference calls, and interviews – virtual, face-to-face, or a combination of the two. Dependence upon a single information source is not advised.

The singularly most important premise of the council-manager form of government is the political neutrality of the manager, who is professionally required to perform in a non-partisan manner and to avoid electoral politics. This professional standard, along with education and training, ensures that the professional manager relies on technical and administrative reasoning in all official duties.

Similarly, the governing body’s role in the recruitment and the selection of a manager must remain politically neutral. Elected members must not expect the manager to share their political perspectives. The governing body must not inject partisan politics into selecting a new manager.

RESUME REVIEW:

Unless the governing body has retained an executive recruiting firm to assist in the selection or is using the services of FCCMA’s Senior Advisor Program or the FAC services, the governing body must review resumes.

USING THE ADOPTED CRITERIA:

To narrow the field of applicants, those reviewing the resumes must compare them with the recruiting criteria adopted by the governing body at the onset of recruitment.

DETERMINING FINALISTS:

A common selection initially reduces the applicants to a highly qualified group of approximately ten (10) candidates. When the initial resume review has been completed, the most qualified, smaller (perhaps 5 – 9) second-round group of applicants will be subject to more thorough background checks, including references, social media usage history, and possibly virtual interviews. All finalists should have a full background check. The governing body must resist the temptation to select finalist candidates before background checks have been completed.

Based upon the candidates’ qualifications per the original selection criteria of the governing body and the results of the background checks, the governing body then chooses a smaller group of 3 - 5 finalists, who are invited to the community for interviews.

¹²See Exhibit F. “Background Checks – Recommended Scope of Services.”

It is recommended the governing body prepare a list of reserve candidates in the event that any finalists decide not to pursue the position.

MECHANICS OF INTERVIEWING:

Interviewing must be well organized and the setting comfortable. A discussion leader should be designated, and all governing body members must participate. The governing body may opt for individual discussions with each finalist, but only in addition to the public interviews.

Some types of questions or inquiry are prohibited by law. The city or county attorney should prepare a report or guideline of what types of questions or inquiry must be avoided in either the public interview or individual discussions. The focus must always remain on KSA – knowledge, skills, and abilities. The governing body should ask the same questions of each candidate.¹³

EMPLOYEE/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN INTERVIEWING:

The governing body may choose to supplement interviewing by inviting employees, community leaders, and/or the public in general to participate. For example, finalists may meet with the department heads or other staff to review departmental operations in more detail or to receive a tour of the community. Similarly, finalists may meet with selected community leaders to receive input on matters the leaders consider important to the local government. A public reception or question-and-answer session with candidates is often held. Note that this type of involvement is to provide the candidates with additional information about the community. Employees and/or community members will not be involved in the actual selection of the city manager.

PARTNER INVOLVEMENT IN INTERVIEWING:

If the partner is invited to accompany the finalist candidate, this part of the selection must be well-organized and based on the interests of the partner, insofar as that can be determined and accommodated. Additionally, partner involvement may be beneficial to the candidate's review and assessment of the community.

REIMBURSEMENT OF INTERVIEW EXPENSES:

Confirm the city or county policy on reimbursement of expenses in conjunction with the interview. The practice of most local governments is to reimburse candidates and partners for any actual out-of-pocket expenses.

¹³See Exhibit G. "Do's and Don'ts of Interviews and Interactions with Candidates."

¹⁴If comment cards are used for feedback at a public reception or session, be mindful that in Florida those comments are public record.

POST-SELECTION:

Selection produces three possible outcomes:

- One finalist has emerged as the clear choice.
- The governing body has narrowed down to more than one finalist whom they would like to pursue further.
- No finalists are acceptable.

If one clear first choice occurs, the governing body, through its representative, can notify the candidate, confirm the willingness of the candidate to accept the position, and then move to finalize a total compensation package and other arrangements.

If the governing body decides to further consider two or three finalists, it may choose to invite those finalists (and possibly the finalists' partners) for a second interview.

If no finalists meet the governing body's expectations, the governing body may decide to rescreen some of the applicants who did not make the first round of finalists. Another option is to restart the entire search.

If the governing body is unable to satisfactorily conclude negotiations with the first-choice finalist, the governing body may want to open discussions with one, some, or all the other finalists.

Until all arrangements have been completed with a first-choice finalist, the governing body should postpone notifying the other finalists. Additionally, after successful negotiations with a new manager have been made, all other applicants should be notified as a professional courtesy.

FINALIZING COMPENSATION AND TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT:

After the governing body has chosen the new manager and that individual has indicated a willingness to serve as manager, a representative of the governing body and the city or county attorney should be designated by the governing body to discuss and finalize compensation and other terms of employment with the selected candidate.¹⁵ The final terms of employment and compensation, including an employment agreement compliant with Florida Statutes, must be reviewed and approved at a public meeting by the governing body.¹⁶

¹⁵See Exhibit H. "Preparing the Job Offer and Contract Approval Process."

¹⁶See Exhibit I. "Sample Florida Employment Agreements."

SUMMARY:

Based on the adopted criteria and objectives for the position, the governing body makes the final determination of the applicants selected for interviews. The finalist group must be large enough to expose the governing body to a workable number of diverse competencies, skill sets, and personalities. Political neutrality of the governing body and the candidate is essential. Staff, community, and partner involvement may be included in the interview. The local government should reimburse interviewees. In most cases, a minimum of 3-5 finalists are interviewed face-to-face. The governing body may establish a back-up finalist group in case any of the finalists decide not to pursue the position. Following the interviews, the governing body selects its choice as candidate to offer employment and discuss terms of employment, which must be approved by the governing body at a public meeting.

CONCLUSION

Selecting a professional manager is one of the most important decisions a city or county will make. Following each of these steps can enhance success. The thorough, consistent, and transparent process in this Florida City/County Manager Search Guide promotes cohesive and effective local government.

LIST OF EXHIBITS

- A. Florida Local Government Executive Search Firms
- B. Search Firm Services Typically Provided
- C. Sample Manager Profile
- D. Manager Salary and Benefit Information
- E. Places to Advertise
- F. Background Checks—Recommended Scope of Services
- G. Do's and Don'ts of Interviews and Interaction with Candidates
- H. Preparing the Job Offer and Contract Approval Process
- I. Sample Employment Agreements



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