

What to Include in an Employment Ad

The Municipal Assistance Center is often asked by members whether they are legally required to post job openings when hiring employees. The short answer is that there is no state or federal law that specifically requires a municipal job posting, but members must heed other relevant requirements such as a town hiring policy or union contract provision. They should also consider past hiring practices and public expectations. Sometimes there are good reasons to fill an opening without posting it, e.g., having to fill the position immediately, certain instances of promotion from within, or hiring a second choice when the first person hired does not work out. In most municipal hiring situations, however, online and print employment ads serve as important tools to attract the best and broadest pool of candidates.

To write an effective job advertisement, it is essential to understand the type of candidate you seek. While that may seem painfully obvious, employers sometimes discover only later in their search process the candidate qualities they *don't* want. To avoid wasted time and needless angst, it pays to do a little homework to identify the traits of desirable candidates before you advertise.

The process starts with a well-written, up-to-date job description that clearly describes the job's essential functions, requirements and success factors. Additionally, consider the following questions:

- Who has performed this job well and what traits have contributed to that success?
- What type of direct experience or training is needed and what skills and abilities gained in other arenas would transfer well to this role?
- Could a less experienced but talented person learn the job quickly enough, or is a more seasoned individual called for?

Armed with the job description and answers to these questions, it is much easier to write an ad that includes the essential information your target audience needs in order to make the decision to apply. These include:

- major job responsibilities;
- required qualifications such as education, experience, and skill level;
- additional qualifications that may be preferred;
- information about what makes the municipality an attractive place to work;
- title of the supervisor to whom the position reports;
- starting pay or hiring range;
- how to apply (such as via email, regular mail, or online application);
- what to include in the application materials (such as the municipality's application form or a cover letter, resume, and contact information for three references);
- the application deadline or date on which review will begin; and
- the phrase "Equal Opportunity Employer" or its abbreviation, "EOE."

It helps to be as specific as possible and include requirements such as certifications, licenses, expected work hours, or unusual work conditions. Such clarity will reduce the number of unqualified applicants. Likewise, listing the pay level or hiring range discourages applications from individuals whose compensation requirements are too high.

The job advertisement also provides the first opportunity for the candidate to evaluate the employer. This is because the evaluation and interview process goes both ways and potential candidates will judge the municipality even as they are being evaluated. Therefore, it is important to list not only what the municipality is seeking in candidates. To garner a stronger candidate pool and place the municipality in a positive light, ads should highlight why a qualified person would want to work for the municipality. Some examples of attractive work characteristics are job growth potential, training opportunities, a pleasant work environment, a vibrant downtown, collaborative colleagues, flexible hours, commuting conveniences such as proximity to a bus route, excellent benefits, and employee wellness programs.

Another feature of an effective employment ad is an appearance that draws the eye. This may include the municipal logo or other appropriate graphic image that provides a “flavor” of the town or city. A box-style ad needs a fair amount of white space to appear professional and readable so it pays to ensure it is large enough. If the ad needs to remain small for budgetary reasons, it can be a good idea to include fewer words along with a link to the job posting and full job description posted on the municipal website. When linking to the municipality’s website, it is crucial to make sure the referenced information is posted online before the employment ad runs. Finally, it is important to proofread the ad before it is published. Require newspaper or print publications to email a copy of the ad to you for approval prior to publication. Online postings can be previewed immediately after you enter the information. Also double-check the published versions to make sure no changes were made.

Although it takes some effort and attention to detail, a well-written, well-placed job advertisement should attract a robust pool of applicants. The stronger the candidate pool, the greater the municipality’s chance of finding and hiring the best person for the job. Future articles will describe additional steps in the hiring process. Keep in mind that filling vacancies for elected or statutorily appointed municipal officials have different legal requirements. Contact the Municipal Assistance Center for assistance with these issues.

VLCT members may post their job openings on the VLCT website free of charge.

Jill Muhr
VLCT Human Resources Consultant