Important Steps to Hiring Well

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Across the state, the recruiting environment right now is incredibly challenging. It is even more difficult for some municipal positions such as those in highway and law enforcement. Nonetheless, hiring well is still the best way to prevent employment-related problems, and following these key steps can facilitate a smooth and successful hiring process. If your municipality's personnel policy or collective bargaining agreement includes hiring steps and requirements, be sure to follow them carefully!

1. Determine what you need in a candidate. What qualifications have made others successful in this role? Taking the time to carefully review the job description and update it to accurately identify the job's responsibilities, qualifications, and essential physical demands will support several other steps in the recruitment process.

2. Plan the search process that you'll use for all applicants. To ensure consistency and prevent bias, decide what the steps will be and who will be responsible for carrying out specific tasks. Your plan should address questions such as which application materials candidates should submit, how applicants will be ranked and selected for interviews, and who will craft interview questions to be posed to all candidates. Find other important considerations here.

3. Attract a pool of well qualified candidates. Use the up-to-date job description and create a compelling and targeted ad that is clear about the position and also touts your municipality as an attractive place to work. Make the ad more personal with the words "you" and "we" to help candidates envision themselves as part of your team. To attract public service and civic minded individuals, consider promoting the opportunity to contribute to the community as a benefit of the role.

4. Communicate with all applicants. Email a quick acknowledgement and thank-you to every applicant. If you can, let applicants know the steps and general timing of the search process, and apprise them when an individual has been hired. Keep communications with unsuccessful applicants simple and polite. Unsuccessful interviewees deserve a personal phone call or a more tailored rejection letter.

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5. Screen and interview. Compare applicant information with the job qualifications (a spreadsheet can be a big help) and use the job description as you craft lawful, job-related questions. Use a structured format in which all interviewees are asked the same questions. Interviews are not only crucial for discerning who is well qualified and apt to succeed within your municipal environment, they are also an important opportunity for you to let candidates know why they would want to work for you. Consider a second or third round of interviews if necessary to get enough information to make a wise decision.

Note: Be sure to comply with Vermont's Open Meeting Law, Public Records Act, and any other applicable legal requirements. If you're unsure call VLCT or your town attorney.

6. Select and verify. Before extending an offer, telephone at least three professional references – people who worked directly with the candidate – so you can frame your questions and ask for more details. Make sure all reference checking questions are job-related to avoid unlawful discrimination. Vermont law prohibits asking for present salary or salary history unless you are verifying information the candidate volunteered on their own.

Make the offer of employment contingent upon the candidate providing relevant credentials (e.g., transcripts and licenses). For positions that require a CDL, be sure to follow federal requirements, including pre-employment drug and alcohol testing (as detailed here). For certain positions, it makes sense to hire a firm to conduct a more in-depth background check before making an offer. When doing so, it is important to follow legal notification and sign-off requirements.

Hiring a police officer comes with specific requirements based on statutes, rules put in place by the Vermont Criminal Justice Council, and best practices. These requirements are outlined in *Recommendations for Recruitment, Hiring and Promotion of Law Enforcement Officers in Vermont*. PACIF members may also contact the VLCT PACIF Law Enforcement Consultant at twhipple@vlct.org for guidance.

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7. Be patient. Aim for a well-qualified second or third choice as a backup plan if the top candidate rejects your offer. If you have significant doubts about the candidate pool, it's better to leave the position vacant. Hire temporary help, if necessary, while you pause and evaluate your search process for potential improvements, such as the pay level or advertising venues. When a first recruitment attempt falls through, a second effort usually succeeds.

Diversity and inclusion. At each of the above steps, work to actively eliminate bias and inject inclusion. For instance, ensure that the wording of job descriptions and job postings are age- and gender-neutral, e.g, highway supervisor is a gender-neutral title that can replace road foreman. Check that the job's listed qualifications are true requirements that do not unnecessarily weed out good candidates. Avoid using age-biased phrases such as "recent college graduate" or "digital native" and the term "he/she" since some candidates prefer "they" as a pronoun. Consider conducting a "blind" review of applications and resumes, in which candidates' names are withheld during the screening process. Ensure all interview questions and pre-employment testing requirements are strictly job-related, and are applied to all candidates who are at the same stage of your process. Finally, once you have hired your new employee, make sure the person succeeds by warmly welcoming them into your municipality and providing a robust onboarding process that affords strong support through introductions to colleagues, inter-departmental meetings, ample guidance, trainings, and mentorship. These efforts will help you retain the person in whom you have invested so much time, energy, and money to find and hire!

For more information on hiring well, refer to vlct.org/resource/hiring-toolkit. For resources related to writing job descriptions, visit vlct.org/resource/job-descriptions-toolkit.

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