

Getting the Right Fit: The Governing Board's Role in Hiring a Manager

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and Carl W. Stenberg



About the Series

Local Government Board Builders offers local elected leaders practical advice on how to effectively lead and govern. Each of the booklets in this series provides a topic overview, specific tips on effective practice, and worksheets and reflection questions to help local elected leaders improve their work. The series focuses on common activities for local governing boards, such as selecting and appointing committees and advisory boards, planning for the future, making better decisions, improving board accountability, and effectively engaging stakeholders in public decisions.

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Introduction

Hiring a manager may be the most important decision a local governing board makes. The city or county manager is appointed by and works directly for the governing board, carrying out the board's policies, directing the local government organization, and representing the city or county in a variety of settings. A public manager has a substantial role in all aspects of local government and community affairs.



Experienced city and county managers were asked to provide feedback on their most and least successful hiring experiences and to offer suggestions for the hiring process. Excerpts from their responses appear throughout the book.

North Carolina is known as a “good government” state. This reputation is based in large part on the state’s long history of using professional local government managers. Although the North Carolina General Statutes do not mandate that city and county governments hire managers, all of the state’s one hundred counties and the majority of cities and towns with populations over five thousand have professional managers.

As North Carolina’s population increases, more and more jurisdictions are seeking to hire managers. At the same time, many of the state’s present managers are nearing retirement age. Local elected officials hoping to recruit and retain talented professional managers often face challenges as they identify and hire qualified candidates.

The governing board as a whole is responsible for selecting a public manager for the local government. To make sure the new manager will be a good fit for the organization, the board needs to agree on expectations for the new manager and design a process that will enable it to hire the best candidate for the job. Appendix 1 provides a list of eight expectations for effective board–manager relations.



Any board hiring a manager must first assume ownership of the process and recognize that it will probably be the most important decision they will make as a group. While the process may require some professional guidance and assistance, the board should remain involved in every phase of the selection process.

Getting the right fit rarely happens by accident. The chapters that follow provide local elected officials with an overview of their responsibilities in hiring a public manager and outline the essential steps in a successful hiring process.