

Hiring a City or County Manager



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Hiring a city or county manager is one of the most important actions that a local governing board can take. The working relationship between the manager and the board can have a significant influence on the effectiveness of the local government that they both serve. This article suggests a process designed to ensure, as much as possible, that a board's selection of its next manager will meet its own needs and those of the citizens. The process is appropriate whether a board is hiring its first manager or replacing one who has resigned or been fired.

There is one circumstance in which the process described in this article might not be necessary: if a clearly qualified and agreed-on successor such as an assistant manager is already present in the organization, the local governing board may want to proceed directly to appointing that person at the next regular or special meeting.⁷ Even in such a case, however, the board may want to use part or all of this process in its deliberations.

Some local governing boards go through the hiring process relying entirely on varying degrees of assistance from staff. Others call on the Institute of Government, the North Carolina League of Municipalities, or the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners for help in structuring or conducting the process. Some boards have hired commercial search firms to manage

parts or all of the process for them. These firms generally charge either a flat fee or 15 to 30 percent of the hired manager's first-year salary to perform some combination of the various tasks involved. Some boards are attracted to using a search firm because it can plan and manage the entire recruitment process for them. Others want to take advantage of the ability of most search firms to seek out and recruit persons who might fit the particular needs of the community but might not currently be intending to move. Some boards also like the idea of having a search firm perform the initial screening of applicants and present to the board only a short list for serious consideration. Others, however, prefer to see the whole pool of applicants. Regardless of how a board decides to conduct its search or how involved it is in particular parts of the process, it might use the steps described in this article as a framework for planning and arranging its search and as a checklist of essential tasks.

Perspective: Selection of a Manager as a Decision-Making Process

A local governing board can select a manager in a rational way by figuring out what the community needs, looking at several candidates with an eye to how well each one fits the needs, and then choosing the best of the candidates on that basis. Assuming that the board's goal is to hire the best manager whom it can attract, it can answer the following questions using the various steps:

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- What skills and personal characteristics should a person have to be the ideal manager for this community, and what is the relative importance of those skills and characteristics?(Step 1)
- How can the board find people who have some mixture of the skills that it needs and who are interested in the job?(Step 2)
- How do those people compare with one another, especially with respect to the most important skills?(Steps 3-4)
- All things considered, which of those people would be best for this community?(Step 5)

Step 1: Determine the needs of the jurisdiction and develop a profile of the ideal candidate.

Before it does anything else, the local governing board can smooth the path that it is about to take by assessing future demands on the manager: What will be happening in the community? What will the prominent or controversial issues be? What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the current organization as it moves into the future? What will the public workforce be like, and how will it change? How does the board want the manager to divide his or her efforts between internal management of the organization and external management of the board's agenda in the community?

The answers to these questions are likely to be different for almost every city and county. Figure 1 shows the list of community issues developed by the Kinston City Council in 1994 during this initial stage of recruiting a new city manager.

Having taken time to think and talk specifically about the most important issues facing the community now and in the future, the local governing board should then identify specific skills, abilities, knowledge, and previous experience that it seeks in candidates. Otherwise, it runs the risk of choosing a manager on the basis of stereotypical characteristics that will not necessarily be relevant to its particular circumstances. For example, if a county is steadily losing employment opportunities and population and the county commissioners think that the new manager must play a key role in helping to reverse these trends, a candidate who has built a glittering reputation serving a series of affluent suburban communities will not necessarily meet that particular county's needs. Similarly, if a city is experiencing serious problems of employee morale, it may want to make an effort to identify and attract applicants who have demonstrated records of successfully dealing with employees' problems, even appli-

Figure 1

Issues Facing Kinston over the Next 5-10 Years
(January 1994)

Development of the Global Transpark
 Need to develop a surface water source for growth
 Keeping utilities and general service costs as low as possible
 Maintaining a healthy tax base to keep taxes as low as possible
 Attracting new businesses while preserving existing ones
 Crime prevention
 Equal opportunity for development of human potential
 Providing more job opportunities for young people in the community
 Meeting the needs of a growing elderly population
 Finding alternatives to traditional landfill disposal
 Improving the quality of education with better preparation, ages birth to five years
 Improving communication with citizens about public issues
 Improving race relations in the community
 Making city government more efficient
 City beautification
 Maintaining and replacing infrastructure
 Affordable housing becoming more scarce
 Providing more parks and recreation opportunities
 Effective planning and development

cants who may have less experience in other aspects of the job.

In 1996 about eighty-two hundred members of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) met the standards of education and experience in local government management necessary to qualify for membership. With this large a pool of qualified local government managers, the majority of applicants who respond to a local governing board's advertisement will probably be impressively qualified in some respect. However, no two of them will be the same. Applicants will have different combinations of strengths and weaknesses. The challenge facing a board is to choose from many capable applicants the person who comes closest to having the unique set of skills and abilities that is needed to deal with the board's most important community and organizational issues. Therefore it is useful for board members to review the list of issues that they have developed and to specify the kinds of characteristics that they think their manager will need to be effective.

A local governing board can identify community issues and manager characteristics by brainstorming, or by having members take turns contributing, until everyone is satisfied that the group has not missed anything relevant. Usually the resulting list of desirable attributes is fairly long. The board can focus on

Figure 2
 Characteristics to Be Sought in the Kinston City Manager
 (January 1994)

Score	Characteristic
16	Proven track record of success in management and leadership
14	Very sensitive to tax burden on citizens and business; promotes efficiency
12	Sensitive to and works well with employees; good team-building skills
12	Experience in local government
9	Effective communicator among council, employees, and citizens
9	Knowledge and background in planning and development
8	Strong financial skills
8	Will implement council decisions effectively even when he/she disagrees
7	Knowledge of economic development
6	Knowledge of electric and water utilities
6	Open to new ideas
5	Ability to work well with the county
4	Can relate to and communicate well with all parts of the community
3	Willing to speak up for own professional judgment
2	Will participate actively in community outside of governmental duties
1	Progressive
0	Experience in transition from agricultural to industrial base

the most critical items by combining any redundant or similar items and then trying to agree on the relative importance of the characteristics. A somewhat tedious but very effective way to do this is to perform a “pairwise comparison” of all the items on the list.² Then the board has a short manageable list of the criteria on which it might focus in reviewing applicants’ qualifications during the rest of the process.

Some local governing boards have asked department heads or other employees to add their point of view on the profile of an ideal manager.³ The advantage of doing this is that it can give the elected officials irjsight into characteristics that might not be directly important to them but might affect morale and efficiency in the organization on which the board depends for administration. A possible disadvantage is that it might create unrealistic expectations among employees about the extent to which the board will follow their advice, unless the board is very clear about how it intends to use the advice.

Figure 2 shows the requirements and the priorities that the Kinston City Council developed from the community issues shown in Figure 1 and from advice that it solicited from department heads.

Developing this profile of the ideal candidate

makes almost every other step in the hiring process easier and more effective. First, the local governing board has a realistic basis on which to decide what salary range it will offer in order to obtain the skills and the experience that it needs. Second, it is in a position to compose a clear, specific advertisement that can save time and effort by discouraging inappropriate applications. Third, it has a valid and effective screening device with which to select the applicants who appear most qualified and whom it wants to examine in more detail. Fourth, it can use the criteria to construct a valid set of questions or tasks to use in its interviews or other assessment procedures. Finally, it can use the criteria to evaluate the qualifications and the performance of the finalists overall.

Step 2: Plan a hiring strategy and recruit applicants.

Before it goes further, the local governing board should outline an overall strategy and a rough timetable for hiring the new manager. Doing this will give board members a realistic view of how long it is likely to be until a new manager is at work and how much of their time they should expect to devote to the effort. Table 1 shows a typical and a faster timetable that a board might expect to follow. It is unusual for a board to do a thorough job of recruiting outside candidates and have a new manager on duty in less than four and a half to five months. The process may take longer if there is substantial disagreement among board members, a shortage of good candidates, or other complicating factors. Overall, time spent up front developing a clear profile for the new manager and planning carefully for the recruitment can save time in the long run by making everything else that the board does in the process more efficient and more effective.

Setting a salary range at the outset has the same advantages as setting a maximum price when one is going out to buy a car: it makes the search realistic and limited. Like a car buyer, the local governing board might later decide to exceed its planned limit if it wants a candidate badly enough to do so, but setting a tentative limit establishes reasonable expectations for board members and potential candidates. The board should consider factors such as the skills and the qualifications in the profile that it has developed, the size and the complexity of the community and its governmental operations, the general cost and standard of living in the community, and the salary levels of managers of comparable jurisdictions in and possibly outside North Carolina.⁴

Providing salary information in the advertisement can serve as a screening device. If the salary is significantly higher or lower than the needs or the reasonable expectations of some prospective applicants, they might be less likely to submit a fruitless application.

An advertisement that reflects the profile also serves as a screen by deterring applicants who do not have the characteristics that the local governing board seeks and by attracting the attention of persons who do. Other information that candidates look for in an advertisement includes the board's size and method of election, the past rate of turnover among managers (typically expressed as the number of managers who have been in the job over some number of years), the population of the jurisdiction, any significant future directions in which the board and the community are headed, and any peculiarities in how the jurisdiction is organized or how it provides services.

Advertising in the biweekly ICMA *Newsletter*⁵ will bring in more applications from experienced professional city and county managers than any other single effort. Most boards choose to use other recruitment media as well, especially if they want to make a special effort to reach candidates in particular fields of the public or private sector, in particular geographical areas, including their own locality, or from particular racial or ethnic groups.⁶ The jurisdiction's human resources staff can help the board identify these special arenas and arrange to advertise in them.

The board might also employ an executive search firm to find and recruit candidates who fit the profile, or do this itself if members know of promising candidates and the board is not concerned about creating ill will by recruiting another jurisdiction's manager.

Step 3: Screen applicants.

The local governing board should designate one person to receive applications, check them for completeness, and ensure that only board members have access to them. Care must be taken to preserve the confidentiality of the applications unless and until the applicants release the city or the county from that obligation.⁷ If the board is using a search firm, it should provide this service. Otherwise, a staff person can assist the board, in which case it is important that the person chosen have the full confidence of the entire elected body.

The local governing board has many options for screening applications in a way that minimizes the risk of violating confidentiality and satisfies board mem-

Table 1
Reasonable Recruiting Timetable for a City or County Manager

Step	Amount of Time	
	Typical	Fast
1. Determine needs.	1 week	1 week
2. Recruit applicants.	8 weeks	6 weeks
3. Screen applicants.	3 weeks	1 week
4. Assess candidates.	6 weeks	4 weeks
5. Hire manager.	1 week	1 week
	19 weeks (5 months)	13 weeks (3 months)
Manager gives notice and reports.	2 months	1 month
	7 months	4 months

bers' needs for access to the applications. The personnel officer might screen out applications that clearly fail to meet basic factual qualifications in the profile, or sort applications into several groups according to apparent level of qualification. A committee of board members might do an initial screening for the whole board. If, in the interest of openness, the board wants to give all the members access to all the applications, it might appoint the whole board as the recruiting committee and either screen applications as a committee or create a subcommittee for that purpose.⁸ If such a subcommittee is appointed to produce a short list from which the entire board will select persons to interview, any member can still review all the applications received to satisfy herself or himself that no promising candidate has been missed in the screening process.

Applications can be copied for distribution to members during screening. However, many local governing boards feel more secure about meeting the requirements of confidentiality if members review the original applications in the place of custody, normally the office of the personnel officer.

When all the members have reviewed applications in whatever manner the board decides, they can meet as a board, compare notes, and decide whom they want to interview. Most boards invite three to seven candidates for an interview or an assessment center (explained later). However, some boards have conducted short screening interviews of up to ten or so applicants before narrowing the field to a smaller set of candidates. The board or its subcommittee can conduct these screening interviews, or it can contract with a search firm to conduct and videotape the interviews for

board members to view at their convenience. In any case, when the screening interviews are complete, the whole board agrees on a few candidates to invite for more intensive assessment.

The screening of applications can usually be done in two or three weeks. The use of screening interviews can double or triple that time, depending on how they are done.

Step 4: Assess candidates.

The most common method of assessing candidates is to interview them. However, the interview is limited in its reliability in predicting success on the job. The best predictor of a person's behavior on the job is behavior itself, and interviews reveal only what candidates *say* about their behavior. To a large extent, the person being interviewed can tell the interviewer what she or he wants to hear without having to back it up. The "assessment center," a series of exercises designed to demonstrate candidates' actual ability to perform relevant work tasks, is a more reliable predictor of a person's ability to do a given job.⁹ However, because a valid and effective assessment center is difficult to design, and expensive and time-consuming to administer, most local governing boards still depend on interviews to assess candidates.

The board can take several precautions to increase the validity and the reliability of its interviews. First, it can carefully design the interview. If the desirable characteristics and the priorities that the board has identified in step 1 accurately reflect the needs of the community and its government, then they provide a valid focus for the board's examination of each candidate and its designing of questions that will yield relevant data in the limited time available for each interview. Allowing for introductions, follow-up questions from board members, and closing questions from the candidate, a one-hour interview permits only four or five questions to be explored adequately. If the board wants to obtain more information than that from the interview, then it should plan to increase the time that it allots to each candidate accordingly.

Figure 3 presents a list of possible interview questions developed by the Kinston City Council using the desired characteristics shown in Figure 2. Two observations about this list are especially important: (1) The characteristic of fourth-highest priority in Figure 2, experience, can be determined from a candidate's résumé, so the council did not plan to spend scarce interview time on it. (2) The council ultimately chose

just a few of the questions to include in its interviews in order to keep within the time limits that it had set.

A second step that a local governing board can take to improve its interviews is to conduct them consistently. Asking each candidate the same set of key questions in the same sequence and in the same manner provides a yardstick by which to compare candidates' responses. As long as the board establishes this common basis for comparison, it is still free to vary its follow-up questions to explore the differences among the people whom it interviews.

Third, after each interview, while impressions are fresh, the board should discuss the ratings that members have given to the candidate's responses. Where the ratings differ significantly, divergent members should discuss their reasoning. Sometimes one person sees, hears, or infers something that another did not. It is helpful for the members to exchange information and impressions and try to resolve the different perceptions. Some boards try to reach consensus¹⁰ on the ratings. Others find that hard to do and do not consider it worth the effort.

The board should plan and arrange each candidate's interview visit with care. Several purposes can be accomplished during the visit: the candidate can tour the community and get a feel for it; meet department heads and community leaders such as the superintendent of schools and the director of the chamber of commerce; and obtain information about housing, schools, and other matters of interest to the candidate's family. Some jurisdictions invite spouses to accompany candidates so that they can form an opinion about the community, but this is neither expected nor necessary if the board thinks that the cost is too high. Other jurisdictions prefer to invite the successful candidate back with his or her family to be courted after the board has extended an offer. Some boards invite all the candidates at the same time and set up tours, interviews, and other events in rotation. They might then have the candidates together at one or more social functions. Other boards invite each candidate separately. Bringing in candidates all at once shortens the time spent on the search but requires more careful planning and coordination.

Overall, it is realistic to allow a month or more to arrange and conduct the interviews.

Because of the exposure that candidates receive when they visit the community, most boards obtain from each person whom they invite, written permission to release relevant information so that whatever information on candidates is revealed is consistent

with the requirements of *Elkin Tribune* and the candidates' expectations. The open meetings law permits but does not require interviews to be held in closed session.¹¹ However, most jurisdictions have found it difficult and not worthwhile to try to conceal the identity of candidates throughout the visit, even though promising candidates occasionally withdraw in the absence of a guarantee of confidentiality.

Step 5: Hire the manager.

After the interviews the local governing board usually tries to reach consensus on one candidate, perhaps with a backup in case the chosen person does not accept the board's offer or terms of employment. Some managers insist on consensus before they will accept a board's offer, believing that anything less would make their position too tenuous to survive the stress and the strain that the demands of governance and management put on the relationship between a board and a manager. Many managers, however, are willing to start with the tentative security of support from a simple majority of the board.

While it negotiates the terms and the conditions of employment, the board should arrange for final background checks, usually on two or three finalists from whom it will probably select the manager, or on the person who is its first choice. The background investigation usually comprises, as a minimum, a check for a criminal record and a check of the driving record through the jurisdiction's law enforcement agency; verification of education and past periods of employment by the personnel office; and a credit check, which can be performed by any agent of the board with a release from the candidate. Private firms (in addition to search firms) will perform all these background checks as a package for a fee.

Most local governing boards will also make some inquiry of the jurisdiction that the prospective manager currently is serving or the last jurisdiction that she or he served. This might involve calls or a personal visit by an individual or a delegation on behalf of the board to verify personal references, talk to supporters and detractors on the jurisdiction's governing board, and check newspaper coverage to help evaluate how the manager handled tough or controversial issues. The visitors might also check whether there is any person or group with an ax to grind that might try to generate adverse publicity in the manager's new jurisdiction, so that the board can be prepared for it.

The objective of gathering all this information is to

Figure 3

Possible Questions for Kinston City Manager Interviews
(1994)

Track Record

1. Tell us about the major things you accomplished in the last two or three jobs you've held.
2. Give us a few examples of times when you have assumed a position of leadership, either on a particular issue, or of a process over time.
3. Tell us of times when your particular management style has gotten good results and why you think so.

Promotion of Efficiency

1. What are some things a city can do these days to cope with rising costs of goods and services, and still meet community needs without breaking the back of the taxpayer?
2. What are some things the city manager can do directly to reduce pressure on the city's tax base?
3. Tell us about some of the things you've done in your present job to increase efficiency of operations.

Employee Relations

1. Tell us ways you have empowered subordinates in your present job and what benefits that has brought.
2. What things can the city manager do to build teamwork among employees?
3. To whom in your organization would you look for the development of good employee relations, and what would you expect them to be doing?

Planning and Development

1. What are the two or three most important things a city needs to undertake to have reasonable control over its future development? What should the manager's role be in these?
2. How does the city's regulation of development fit in with economic development?
3. Describe what the relationship should be among city council, advisory boards, and staff in planning for the city.

Finance

1. What things should the city pay attention to in order to get a high bond rating?
 2. What constitutes a sound, prudent idle funds investment policy under today's economic conditions?
 3. What are different ways the adopted budget can be used by the city?
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verify what the candidates have asserted about their previous experience and to protect the board from embarrassing revelations after it announces its choice. To this end, most boards ask each candidate who interviews to tell the board about anything in his or her background or experience that might embarrass the board were it revealed publicly.

When the investigation and the negotiations have been successfully completed, the local governing

Additional Resources

Publications

- International City/County Management Association. *Compensation 96: An Annual Report on Local Government Executive Salaries and Fringe Benefits*. Washington, D.C.: ICMA, 1996.
- International City Management Association. *Employment Agreements for Managers: Guidelines for Elected Officials*. Washington, D.C.: ICMA, 1984.
- International City Management Association. *Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator*. Washington, D.C.: ICMA, 1987.

Organizations

- International City/County Management Association, 777 North Capitol Street NE, Washington, DC 20002
- National Association of Counties, 440 First Street NW, Washington, DC 20005
- National League of Cities, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20004
- North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, P.O. Box 1488, Raleigh, NC 27602
- North Carolina City/County Management Association, P.O. Box 3069, Raleigh, NC 27602
- North Carolina League of Municipalities, Albert Coates Local Government Center, 215 North Dawson Street, Raleigh, NC 27602

board notifies the other candidates and then takes formal action in open session to hire the successful candidate. Once the board and the new manager have settled on the terms of employment, the board (usually the mayor or the chair, as the board's representative) should contact each of the other candidates directly to ensure that they learn of the board's decision firsthand. These last steps should be completed carefully to protect the board's interests, but they should also be completed in a timely fashion out of respect for the position of the other candidates. Experience suggests that the more time that passes after the final interview, the less control the board has over the time and the conditions under which its decision becomes public.

An increasing number of cities and counties in North Carolina have formal employment agreements with managers. Sometimes called contracts, they may set out a variety of conditions specific to the manager's employment, such as leave, use of a car for offi-

cial business, expense accounts, participation in professional activities, and virtually anything else that establishes a clear understanding between the board and the manager about the responsibilities, the benefits, and the privileges of the office. They cannot guarantee a term of employment because state law specifies that the manager serves at the pleasure of the governing board. However, recognizing the risk that the manager and his or her family assume by coming to a new community to serve at the will of a political body, some governing boards include provisions in the agreement that require advance notice of resignation in exchange for a lump-sum severance payment in the event that the manager is fired without cause.

Next Steps

At the outset of a new manager's tenure, it is useful for the board and the manager to establish what they expect of each other beyond the very general tenets of statutory and professional responsibilities. Their relationship can enhance or impede the process of governance significantly, so devoting some time to establishing and maintaining a good one is important. No two boards are exactly alike, nor are any two managers. No matter how much previous experience a new manager has had or how many managers a particular community has had, the relationship between a particular governing board and a particular manager is certain to be different in some ways than either of them has previously experienced.

Soon after a new manager is hired and again whenever a significant turnover in the local governing board occurs or a new mayor or chair is elected, the board, the mayor or the chair, and the manager usually find it helpful to review their specific expectations of one another more comprehensively and more specifically than was possible in the interview. Such a discussion allows them to understand what each thinks she or he needs from the others to be effective in carrying out major responsibilities.

Often this discussion takes place in the setting of a retreat, at which the local governing board and the manager might also discuss the substantive goals and plans that the board wants to accomplish as part of its long-range agenda. The result of such a retreat should be a common understanding of what the board wants to achieve and how the board and the manager will work together to accomplish that.¹²

Agreeing on the board's expectations of the manager provides a sound basis for the board's formal and informal evaluations of the manager's performance. The expectations also provide the manager with one reliable reference for continuing self-evaluation during the year. Most governing boards find it effective and convenient to conduct a formal evaluation of the manager once a year, usually associated with their consideration of adjustments in the manager's compensation. Typically the evaluation is held in closed session, with the manager present and participating.¹³

Conclusion

The process of hiring a city or county manager is neither quick nor simple, but it is critically important to the effectiveness of governance in a city or a county with the manager form of government. Time and effort spent on defining carefully what the community and the elected board need in the near future, searching systematically for candidates with attributes that will meet the needs, and thoroughly examining the candidates can yield significant future returns in the form of satisfied citizens, board members, and employees.

[The next issue of Popular Government will include an article on evaluating the manager, by Margaret S. Carlson. A follow-up to her article in the Winter 1994 issue, it will address the most common questions on the subject raised by boards and managers.]

Notes

1. G.S. 153A-81 (for counties) and G.S. 167A-147 (for cities) permit the local governing board to appoint a manager to serve at its pleasure. The board is bound by no procedural requirements beyond a majority vote in an open meeting.

2. To perform a pairwise comparison of items in a list, a group starts by voting on the relative importance of the first item compared with each other item in turn. It places a mark by whichever item wins each vote. Then the group compares the second, third, and each succeeding item with every other item on the list in the same manner until the group has worked through the whole list. At that point, every item has been compared with every other item, and the number of marks next to each item indicates how many times it was voted more important in comparison with another item. Thus the items with the most marks next to them should be the ones that the group believes to be the most critical ones.

3. In two recent recruitments, in Guilford County and Kinston, the boards asked department heads to develop a list of characteristics that they wanted in their next manager to help them do their jobs well. The boards then considered these lists as they developed the profiles.

4. The ICMA publishes Compensation, an annual report of managers' average salaries by state, region, and size of jurisdiction. Each year the Institute of Government publishes County Salaries in North Carolina, and the North Carolina League of Municipalities publishes North Carolina Municipal Salaries for Municipalities above 2,500 Population.

5. Guidelines for advertisements and publication deadlines are published annually and may be obtained from ICMA or the Institute of Government.

6. ICMA also publishes J.O.B. (Job Opportunities Bulletin), a special newsletter circulated among women and minority managers nationwide. A local governing board can request an advertisement in J.O.B. at the same time that it requests an advertisement in the ICMA Newsletter.

7. See Stephen Allred, "North Carolina Supreme Court Issues Decision on Personnel Records Act," Local Government Law Bulletin, no. 43 (July 1992), which discusses disclosure of personnel records, specifically applications for employment. The North Carolina Supreme Court decided in *Elkin Tribune, Inc. v. Yadkin County Board of County Commissioners*, 331 N.C. 735, 417 S.E.2d 465 (1992), that all information maintained by a city or a county on applicants for employment had to be kept confidential, that no information whatsoever about an applicant might be released, and that the local government had no discretion in the matter.

8. The decision of the court in *Elkin Tribune* appears to exclude anyone from seeing the records of an applicant without his or her release except the official having custody of the personnel records (the personnel officer) and the hiring authority (the elected board in the case of the city or county manager).

9. An assessment center might require each candidate to write a brief analysis of an issue, present the analysis to a group including persons playing the role of hecklers, mediate a simulated dispute among persons playing the role of employees, and dispose of a series of items in an in-basket, in addition to going through a structured interview. See Ronald G. Lynch, "Assessment Centers: A New Tool for Evaluating Prospective Leaders," *Popular Government* 50 (Spring 1985): 16-22.

10. Reaching consensus is different from the more familiar process of compromising, and it is hard work. To reach consensus, disagreeing parties must exchange enough valid information so that each can freely agree on and fully support the final position or solution.

11. G.S. 143-318.11(6). In 1993, in an unusual action, the Wilmington City Council opted to hold its interviews of candidates for city manager in an open meeting with no restriction on public attendance.

12. See Kurt Jenne, "Governing Board Retreats," *Popular Government* 53 (Winter 1988): 20-26.

13. See Margaret S. Carlson, "How Are We Doing? Evaluating the Performance of the Chief Administrator," *Popular Government* 59 (Winter 1994): 24-29. ❏