



Bureau Brief—The City Manager Search Process

As Edward M. Augustus, Jr. serves a nine-month temporary term as city manager, the Worcester City Council has initiated a process to identify and hire a permanent replacement. What do the experts say about hiring a city manager?

Thousands of decisions are made every day in cities, towns, and counties that determine our quality of life... Professional managers craft the plans and make the decisions that transform good communities into great ones.

— International City/County Management Association

Since its founding in 1985, The Research Bureau has worked to support the City Council /Manager Modified Plan E form of government in Worcester by providing timely, accurate research and analysis of public policy issues. In 1993 and in 2004, during transitions in the city manager position, The Research Bureau issued reports on best practices to identify and hire good city manager candidates. This *Bureau Brief* is an update on those two reports including 2012 recommendations released by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

Worcester City Charter—The Role of the City Manager

“The city manager shall have and possess, and may exercise, all the power, rights and duties, other than legislative, commonly associated with municipal chief executive or administrative officers. The city manager shall be the chief administrative and executive officer of the city and shall be responsible to the city council for the proper administration of all city affairs properly entrusted to him/her by the city council or under this charter.”

Under the Charter, the powers and responsibilities of the city manager include:

- (1) To act as chief conservator of the peace
- (2) To supervise the administration of the affairs of the City
- (3) To ensure execution of the general laws and the ordinances, resolutions, and regulations of the City
- (4) To make recommendations to the City Council concerning the affairs of the City
- (5) To make reports to the City Council upon the affairs of the City
- (6) To keep the City Council advised of the City's financial condition and future needs
- (7) To prepare and submit budgets to the City Council for all City agencies under his/her jurisdiction.

Worcester City Charter—Qualifications for City Manager

“The city manager shall be appointed on the basis of his/her administrative and executive qualifications only and need not be a resident of the city or commonwealth when appointed; provided, however, that he/she shall become a resident of the city within six months of his/her appointment. No person, age seventy or over, shall be eligible to serve as city manager. No member of the city council shall during his/her term of office be chosen as city manager and no person who has within two years been elected to or served in any elective office in the city or in Worcester county shall be chosen as manager.”

The Body Politic and Corporate

In selecting a city manager, City Council should consider that Worcester’s CEO faces some notable similarities, and differences, when compared to private-sector corporate counterparts:

- Reports to an elected board of 11 councilors.
- Has nearly 183,000 shareholders/residents.
- Manages an annual budget of more than \$560 million (including City and Worcester Public Schools).
- Oversees a staff of approximately 1,700 (not including Worcester Public Schools).
- Engages on issues including basic operations (administration, board management, human resources, public finance, municipal law), product management (building maintenance, streets & sidewalks, water & sewer, waste disposal), product development (schools, parks, libraries, economic development, public health), corporate security (police, fire, code enforcement, emergency response), and, especially, public relations.
- Operates subject to stringent budgeting, labor, procurement, public information, and ethics laws.

This Bureau Brief is a short summary of best practices in the City Manager selection practice. Stay tuned to www.wrrb.org and follow us on Twitter (@WRRBureau) for more information.

Four Key Steps in Hiring a City Manager

1. *Define the Position and the Expectations*—As the hiring body, the City Council must establish the organization's needs and identify the ideal characteristics of a city manager candidate. The City Council's findings should be incorporated into the application to solicit comparable information from each applicant.
2. *Recruit Candidates from a Wide Talent Pool*—A large and diverse pool of applicants increases the odds of a successful city manager search. Advertising (i.e., posting the position to job search sites) and direct outreach (i.e., identification and encouragement of qualified candidates) are both necessary forms of recruitment.*
3. *Evaluate Candidates and Narrow to Finalists*—The City Council must undertake a rigorous review of applications, screening of candidates through phone interviews, and preliminary conversations with references with comparison to above-referenced organizational needs and ideal candidate characteristics. A smaller set of finalists—generally five to ten—should be invited to in-person interviews.
4. *Select City Manager and Negotiate Contract*—Upon completion of the above, City Council should select the first-choice candidate for an in-depth background check. Once successfully completed, the City Council should negotiate compensation with the candidate based on pre-determined limits. If unsuccessful, the City Council should initiate new negotiations with the second choice candidate, etc. If successful, the decision to hire should be unanimous out of respect for the process and should be announced in a deliberate manner.

* According to ICMA, the following sources should be considered for outreach: ICMA, National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, National Association of County Administrators, National Forum for Black Public Administrators, International Hispanic Network, American Society for Public Administration, and other state, county, and municipal organizations.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a critical consideration in the recruitment process. City Council must determine in advance the level of privacy afforded candidates. According to the ICMA, assurance of confidentiality generally results in a greater number of applications, particularly from those currently employed elsewhere. An applicant's current job security and long-term career opportunities can be jeopardized if his or her interest is made public prematurely. Generally, only the names of finalists are released publicly and only after consultation with the applicants.

Questions for Policymakers

- What is the structure of the hiring process, who is the lead/spokesperson, and what is the timeline?
- What is the most accurate description of the Worcester city manager position?
- How does one craft, advertise, and market the position to ensure the largest pool of qualified applicants?
- Is there consensus on the most important characteristic of a new city manager—management ability, knowledge of public finance, familiarity with Worcester's social and economic needs, relevant municipal experience, or political acumen?
- What level of confidentiality will be provided to the candidates?
- What is the role of City staff and/or the public in the interview process?
- Who negotiates with the selected candidate? What are the elements and limits of a compensation package?

For Additional Information

- City of Worcester, Worcester Home Rule Charter, (<http://www.worcesterma.gov/uploads/5e/9a/5e9aab5272883f20905c24ce46dc8b4d/manual-rule.pdf>).
- International City/County Management Association, "Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator." January 2012. (http://icma.org/en/icma/career_network/career_resources/recruitment_guidelines_handbook).
- The Research Bureau, "Oh Manager, Where Art Thou? Best Practices for Selecting a City Manager." July 2004. Report No. 04-07. (http://wrrb.org/files/downloads/reports/pub_admin/2004/04-07.pdf).
- The Research Bureau, "Selecting a City Manager: Facts and Procedures." May 1993. Report No. 93-3. (http://www.wrrb.org/files/downloads/reports/pub_admin/1993/selecting-a-city-manager-facts-and-procedures.pdf).

Bureau Brief

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