



Are you ready for your next job?

Mistakes municipal and county managers make in resumes and cover letters

The average tenure for local government managers is 7-8 years (Source: ICMA). Regardless of your capabilities, you will probably have more than one position as a manager. Your success in securing the next job depends not just on your track record but how you present your accomplishments in the recruiting and screening process.

As a firm involved in numerous executive searches and hiring processes, we have been struck by how some outstanding managers fail to present themselves in the most compelling way. Here are some "do's and don'ts" to consider before you submit your next application or resume.

Resume "Don'ts"

1. Lack of appropriate contact information— in this day and age, not providing an email address screams that you are not tech savvy. You may be conveying to the employer that you are behind in other ways as well. You should not use your employer's email address, nor employer phone as your primary contact information on printed materials. Provide home and mobile phone numbers and personal email address. Free email addresses can be secured through multiple providers such as Gmail, Hotmail and Yahoo. Lastly, make sure you check your email (and spam filter) frequently during the screening process.
2. No details about the most recent municipality or county in which you were employed – you would not hire a manager without knowing how many people were supervised, the size of the budgets overseen, or the population of the community. Comparisons are made against these standards as a basic screening tool.
3. No lists of accomplishments – the basic functions of a manager's role are the same across positions. Without accomplishment statements, all you have provided is a job description. You can spice up your resume by emphasizing what the hiring organization is most interested in - your accomplishments. What initiatives did you take? What projects did you oversee? What did you do to improve the quality of life in your community?
4. No dates of employment – years of experience matter. If you omit dates of employment, it is a major red flag to employers who may wonder what you are failing to reveal. You can and should explain irregularities, such as gaps in employment or short tenure in a position, in a cover letter.
5. Not answering questions the employer poses – if specific items are requested or questions posed and you fail to answer them, you may get screened out of the process. The questions are being asked for a reason that may not be readily apparent to you. Keep in mind that your strongest competitors for the position are probably providing that information.

10 "Do's" When Presenting Yourself to Employers

1. Tailor your cover letter and resume to match your skills with the job announcement.
 - a. Look at what information the job announcement provides (population, services, budget size) and special features (All America City, tourism base, Main Street initiatives) and then make sure your materials highlight your relevant experiences.
 - b. Never use *To Whom It May Concern* for the salutation. Find out the name of the specific contact person for the search process.
2. Use keywords to describe your work. Screening tools are increasingly electronic and operate off of "key word" searches. If your resume does not use common key words, such as "budget analysis", "human resource management", and "supervision", you reduce your chances of being "screened in" to the candidate pool.
3. If you use a functional (as opposed to chronological) format, you still need to provide a work history that lists employers, dates, locations, etc.
4. If adding personal information, choose carefully what to include (family, religion, etc.) since employers cannot ask about this information, nor make decisions using this information, you may want to share personal information sparingly in the screening process
5. Specify your role in achieving organizational accomplishments – provide evidence of your accomplishments and clearly define your role when it is clear that you single-handedly did not accomplish something.
6. Explain gaps in employment.
7. Explain frequent job transitions or short tenure in positions.
8. Research the local government organization ahead of time, their website, local newspapers, blogs. Demonstrate that you have studied the organization by making appropriate references in your cover letter.
9. Be aware of what information is out there about you and be prepared to address it proactively; that is, before the employer brings it up. Most candidates now get "googled" and names are searched on sites, like Linked In and Facebook., etc.
10. Provide actual examples of the following:
 - a. Your leadership
 - b. A mistake you made and what you learned
 - c. Initiatives with staff, citizens
 - d. A conflict or difficult situation
 - e. Your work with Council/Board/ Mayor, etc.
 - f. Community involvement activities
 - g. Interagency successes and projects you worked on with other jurisdictions.

Most of all, do not sell your self short. Participating actively in search processes has a double benefit. First, you can improve your skills as a candidate, especially if you can get accurate feedback on your candidacy. Second, you can become a better employer by putting yourself in the candidate's shoes.

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