



CIVICHR eBook

# **THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

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# **HIRING TOOLBOX**

**CIVICHR®**

# INTRODUCTION

Local government employee recruitment is more than a human resource job function. It is a responsibility that will impact the success of a community and the happiness of the thousands (or millions) of people who live there.

To help ensure your recruitment process is easy to manage, and optimized for the hiring of only the highest quality people, we have your complete local government hiring toolbox.

This comprehensive hiring guide will address:



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If you're ready to take the steps necessary to recruit, identify, and hire the best people, prepared to make the greatest impact in your community, read on.

# HOW TO MANAGE THE JOB REQUISITION PROCESS

A photograph of a woman and a man in an office setting. The woman, on the left, is looking at a laptop screen and smiling. The man, on the right, is also smiling and looking towards the screen. They appear to be in a collaborative work environment.

Today's local governments are too often understaffed and overburdened. As a result, nearly every department would likely request additional staff if given the opportunity. It's the job of human resources departments to streamline the job requisition process not only to ensure all requests are well thought-out and vetted from a budget perspective, but to ensure that both the hiring manager and human resources share a clear understanding of the ideal hire for the position.

To make the requisition process as easy as possible for you and your staff, mandate that all requisitions be submitted using a form created and maintained by human resources. By requiring every hiring manager to use the same form and format, you'll be able to assess each request against the same criteria, and create job descriptions that describe the ideal hire for each position.





In addition to experience, and skill data, make sure your requisition form includes the following key intake details:

- Factors that will determine employee success.
- How the new hire will add value to the existing team.
- The possible career path for anyone hired into the position.
- Desired timeline for hire.
- Baseline hiring qualifications (more on the importance of this factor later).

### **CIVIC TIP**

*To expedite and efficiently manage the job requisition process, rather than using paper forms sent via interoffice mail, use an applicant tracking software (ATS) solution that allows you to track each requisition through the system from creation to review, to approval, to submission, and posting.*

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR WRITING JOB ADS**

Finding the right talent starts with defining the right candidate. The job ads that you post for open positions in your municipal administration will impact the quality of the applicants you receive. The more qualified the applicants, the better opportunity you will have to add the right member to your team who is able to make an immediate impact. When writing effective job ads, keep the following best practices in mind:



## 1.

### **INCLUDE AN OVERVIEW OF THE POSITION**

Start your job description with a clear and concise definition of the primary functions and goals of the position. Be sure to include the required tasks involved, the methods expected to be used to complete those tasks, and the interactions that the position will have with other departments and key stakeholders. Also, be sure to list necessary qualifications. If you know your hire must possess excellent written skills, payroll software knowledge, or a valid driver's license, be sure to add those items into your description.





## 2.

### **USE CLEAR, CONCISE LANGUAGE TO DESCRIBE JOB RESPONSIBILITIES**

Clearly defining the responsibilities of the anticipated hire will help candidates envision themselves in the role and assist them in determining if they are a qualified candidate. Follow these language guidelines:

- Use the present tense and keep statements short and concise.
- Utilize formatting features like bulleted lists to keep the layout clean and easy to read.
- Use gender neutral phrases, or refer to the new hire using “he/she.”
- Avoid vague terms that may make a task seem optional or open to interpretation (e.g., “May be responsible for occasional payroll duties.”)
- When including descriptions of recurring tasks, include the frequency (e.g., Must take and distribute meeting minutes for quarterly committee meeting).



### 3.

## USE ADJECTIVES WISELY

The adjectives that you use in your job description will help set an expectation for the quality of work to be completed. Include descriptions such as “deadline driven,” or “well-organized.” Use adjectives to describe the work environment as well. This will help applicants to consider if they have the ability and desire to meet the needs of the hiring department and manager. For example, applicants should understand if their work will be “fast-paced,” or if they will be managing the landscape of a “dense, wooded area.”

Try using adjectives in association with specific responsibilities to emphasize the quality of the work to be performed. Rather than simply describing the ideal candidate as a “fast learner,” qualify that descriptor by clarifying that the ideal candidate must have the “ability to quickly learn policies and procedures.”



#### 4.

### **CLEARLY DEFINE ESSENTIAL DUTIES**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that job descriptions clearly define which functions are essential. This approach allows persons with disabilities to still be considered and hired for positions for which they can perform essential tasks.

As defined by the ADA, essential functions “are the functions an individual who holds or desires the position must be able to perform unaided or with the assistance of a reasonable accommodation.” Separate essential job functions, from those that are ideal, but not required, to ensure your job listings are ADA-compliant.





## HOW TO CONVERT YOUR JOB DESCRIPTIONS TO PERFORMANCE PROFILES

As we've mentioned, the quality of the applications you receive will be determined by how you position the ideal hire. You must articulate the qualities, experiences, and qualifications that are needed to produce the best outcomes. To paint such a picture, you need more than a job description. You need a performance profile.

Job descriptions attract individuals who want to accomplish tasks. Performance profiles attract individuals who are motivated to accomplish goals.

Where job descriptions attract transient job seekers who are likely to move on if they don't enjoy the position, performance profiles attract committed individuals who are likely to become tenured staff. Most importantly, performance profiles set proper expectations for performance outcomes, which helps human resource managers to identify and hire the most qualified candidates.

What follows is a comparison of the key differences between a job description and a performance profile:

JOB DESCRIPTION	PERFORMANCE PROFILE
Focuses on the job need.	Focuses on the community need.
Focuses on daily tasks.	Focuses on achievable results.
Defines an ideal candidate in skill-based terms.	Defines an ideal candidate in outcomes-based on terms.
Enables the identification of a competent candidate.	Enables the identification of a qualified candidate.
Defines general, desired capabilities.	Defines required, proven proficiencies.
Focuses on quantity of assignments.	Focuses on quality of performance.

If you're ready to convert your current job descriptions into performance profiles, follow these guidelines:

- Define clear goals and objectives in terms of outcomes.
- Define expectations in quantitative and qualitative measures.
- Focus on the daily, monthly, quarterly, and/or annual results that need to be achieved in the role.
- Use your top performers to help draft performance profiles specific to job groups or functions to draw on their knowledge and best practices.

## HOW TO RECRUIT TALENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Local government human resource teams across the country are faced with the same challenge: how to attract quality talent in today's digital-first society. To remain relevant in the job market and attract millennial job seekers, public sector human resource managers are enhancing their talent search strategies to ensure they are reaching qualified talent using the most appropriate channels. To optimize your talent acquisition model and recruit the most qualified pool of applicants possible, make sure your strategy leverages the power of social media, and is optimized for mobile.





## THE PARADIGM SHIFT TO DIGITAL

Today, most job seekers start their search online. According to a 2015 survey by the [Pew Research Center](#), the proportion of Americans who have researched jobs online has doubled in the last ten years:

- 54 percent of adults have gone online to search for a job.
- 45 percent have applied for a job online.



## THE JOB SEARCH GOES MOBILE

THE JOB SEARCH GOES MOBILE

Today, more Google searches are performed from mobile devices than desktop computers. Not only are job seekers looking for employment using a desktop computer, they are searching on-the-go from their mobile devices.

- 28 percent of Americans have used a smartphone as part of a job search.
- Half of smartphone job seekers have used their smartphone to complete a job application.
- 6 percent of adults have used their smartphone to create a resume or a cover letter.
- 53 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds have used a smartphone as part of their job search, as have 37 percent of 30- to 49-year-olds.

Despite the proliferation of hand-held technology, the mobile resources and tools available for job seekers do not always enable a convenient, streamlined experience. Nearly half of smartphone job seekers have reported experiencing difficulties accessing job-related content due to issues with usability and mobile functionality. In addition, 30 percent have reported having difficulty entering a large amount of text into mobile interfaces, or having difficulty submitting supporting documentation from their mobile devices.







To best attract today's mobile-savvy job seekers, local governments need to ensure any job postings or digital talent acquisition tools are mobile responsive. To optimize your job postings on mobile, follow these best practices:

- If you are using an ATS solution to streamline your job recruitment process, make sure it is optimized for mobile so that job postings can be easily read and responded to by mobile device users.
- Write concise job descriptions that can easily be read or scanned from a mobile device screen.
- Ensure the employment page of your local government website is mobile optimized. Not only will it give job searchers viewing your site from a mobile device a better experience, mobile optimized content will rank higher on search engines such as Google and Bing. Remember that mobile optimization includes the use of large, clickable buttons and eliminating large files and graphics that are slow to load.
- Use online forms for job applications, rather than downloadable PDFs that can be impossible for some users to download, complete, and submit from a mobile device.
- Reduce the total amount of career pages a job seeker will need to search through on your website. Slow, repeated page loads can be frustrating to mobile users.
- Use dropdown menus and yes/no responses to primary application questions to minimize free-text response requirements, which are more time consuming to complete for mobile users.

## LEVERAGE THE POWER OF #SOCIALMEDIA

In addition to starting their job hunt from a search engine, many Americans are passively, and actively searching for jobs using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Many job seekers are even using social media to share employment opportunities and refer friends and colleagues, making it a powerful platform for amplifying the reach of your job openings. If you haven't yet incorporated social media into your talent acquisition strategy, consider these facts from the *Pew Research Center*:

- 35 percent of social media users have utilized social media to look for, or research, jobs.
- 21 percent have applied for a job they first found out about through social media.
- 34 percent have used social media to inform friends about available positions at their own employer.
- 13 percent of social media users say information that they have posted on social media has helped them get hired.



If you're ready to leverage the power of social media to help identify and attract talent for your civic staff, start by implementing these best practices:

- Create a YouTube Channel and post videos that describe what makes your community unique and the benefits of working for your local government.
- Share job openings on your community Facebook page, and encourage leaders in your administration to share the posts as well.
- Make sure your Facebook community page includes a job board to offer citizens another channel to learn about open positions.
- Provide the ability to apply to open positions using a LinkedIn profile. This expedites the ability for job seekers to submit an application.
- Promote available job positions using paid Facebook ads. For a minimal investment, you can set-up highly targeted advertisements to ideal candidates, regardless of whether or not they are actively searching for a position.
- Keep all your community social media profiles active by constantly updating content that demonstrates the benefits of civic employment.





## HOW TO STREAMLINE THE QUALIFICATION SCREENING PROCESS

Civil service employment opportunities attract a wide variety of applicants. It is not feasible—or a best practice—to share every application received for a position with the hiring manager. Rather, it is the responsibility of human resources to pre-screen all applicants and only pass on those candidates who meet baseline qualifications.

This process of prescreening candidates can be incredibly time consuming if managed manually. Not only does a manual screening process require time and effort of human resource managers, it can slow down the hiring process, frustrating some applicants, while others go on to accept positions elsewhere.

Using an ATS solution that automates the pre-screening process can help to expedite this first, critical candidate review step. An ATS will screen applications against baseline qualifications that have been previously established by human resources in collaboration with the hiring manager during the requisition development stage.





## **INSIGHTFUL QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING A CANDIDATE JOB INTERVIEW**

In local government, you're not simply hiring a candidate to become part of a team or business. You're hiring someone who will be part of an administration with the ability to impact the lives of thousands, or even millions of citizens. To help ensure you are hiring the right candidate, with the greatest motivation and interest in servicing your community, start incorporating these seven insightful job interview questions into your hiring process.



1.

### **WHAT ASPECT OF WORKING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?**

The ideal candidate will be motivated to improve his community, and make a difference in the lives of friends and neighbors. If the candidate can't immediately articulate why he specifically wants to work in local government, or if he admits he's only interested in a generous benefit package, he may not be results-driven and performance-motivated, which is the type of candidate you'll want to hire.

2.

### **TELL ME SOMETHING INTERESTING ABOUT YOURSELF.**

This is not meant to be a trick question, nor is it meant to make the candidate nervous. Rather, it is an opportunity for you to learn about an experience, hobby, interest, or achievement that the candidate is comfortable sharing and, hopefully, feels is relevant. Perhaps he is among the fourth generation in his family that has lived in your community, or perhaps she volunteers at a homeless shelter on weekends. The answer to this question should give you an understanding of what interests or motivates the candidate outside of work.



3.

### **WHAT ADVANTAGES DO YOU SEE IN WORKING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT?**

You need candidates that will demonstrate the highest ethics and behaviors. A favorably telling response to this question would be, "Having input into decisions that will impact this community." An unfavorable response would be, "Not having to work on any government holidays." Make sure the candidate is motivated by community improvement, and not personal gain.

4.

### **FOLLOW THAT QUESTION BY ASKING, "WHAT DISADVANTAGES DO YOU SEE IN WORKING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT?"**

Asking a candidate questions about negative work-related perceptions can also be very telling. Keep in mind that if the candidate feels there would be a lot of pressure associated with the job, or that he may have to work long hours, such a perception doesn't have to be a negative for you if he demonstrates the ability to rise to the occasion.

5.

**WHAT WOULD BE A CIRCUMSTANCE  
IN WHICH THERE MAY BE A CONFLICT  
BETWEEN YOUR OWN PERSONAL  
BELIEFS AND OPINIONS AND  
THE POLICIES OR PRACTICES OF  
OUR ADMINISTRATION?**

The ideal candidate will want to reassure you that he understands that regardless of personal beliefs, local government employees are expected to always act in the best interest of the community. If a candidate can immediately describe policies in which he disagrees, he may be demonstrating an inability to exercise such an objective perspective.

7.

**WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST  
WEAKNESS?**

Everyone has a weakness, and that's okay, so be wary of a candidate who responds that they are flawless. It may simply be an attempt to demonstrate confidence, but what you need is a candidate with realistic expectations and the ability to demonstrate a modest, humble attitude. Such employees are generally the best suited to work constructively as team players.

6.

**HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR  
CURRENT SUPERVISOR?**

No matter the department or position the candidate has expressed an interest, individuals who work in local government need the ability to exercise tact, discretion, and respond appropriately to potentially controversial questions. A candidate that answers this question with negative remarks about his current supervisor may lack such skills (and may also be revealing his true motivation for seeking alternative employment).



# PERFORMANCE

Beginner

Average

Skilled

Expert

## HOW TO EVALUATE CANDIDATES POST-INTERVIEW

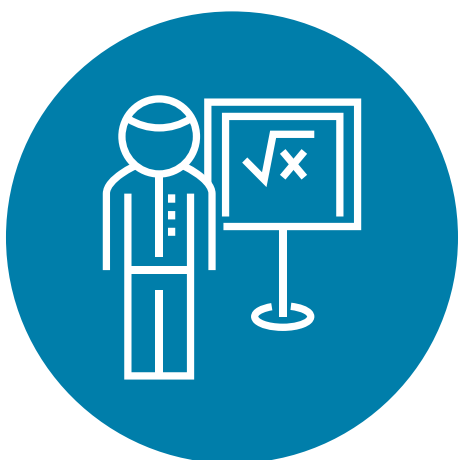
Whether the hiring manager is a tenured employee, or it's his first time being a lead member of a hiring committee, he'll be looking to human resources to help lead the candidate assessment and evaluation process. Follow these best practices while leading the collaborative candidate selection process:



Use the performance profile you created as the criteria against which all short-listed candidates are final assessed.



Ensure everyone who participated in the interviews provides their feedback. If a potentially detrimental piece of information was uncovered just in one meeting with one interviewer, the whole review team needs to be informed so a collaborative discussion can take place.



Don't forget to assess how the candidate will fit in with the team. How successful an individual is in a specific job role will be influenced by how well he gets along with his colleagues and how much he enjoys their company. Assess every candidate against your community's core values to ensure they are a cultural fit for your local government administration.



To ensure equitable decision making for all open positions across departments, use a consistent candidate scoring system. An ATS can help organize and aggregate interviewer scoring and assessments.



# APPLICANT COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

When asked about areas of frustration during the job application process, candidates routinely point to the same issue: lack of communication. When applicants feel like they don't know where they are in the application review process, or even if their resume has been received, it leaves them with a dissatisfied perception of your administration. Such negative interactions with your local government can also make an individual less likely to apply to future opportunities in your local government, and may even tarnish his general perceptions of your municipal leadership.

To offer the type of communication and follow-up that applicants desire from a prospective employer, follow these communication best practices:

- Acknowledge receipt of each application. An online job application system that automates this process for you will save you time and individual effort.
- Let an applicant know that he/she was not selected for an interview. Though you will be communicating disappointing news, it will give the applicant a chance to pursue other opportunities.

- Communicate to applicants who have interviewed over the phone or onsite that they were not chosen for the position. Be sure to sincerely thank them for their time and their interest in the position. Even if they are not a fit for the current position, they may be well suited for a future position, so be sure to end immediate discussions on positive terms.
- Extend job offers in a timely manner, using an offer letter that clearly defines the role and compensation package.
- Survey new hires to ask about the hiring process. Use their feedback to improve your workflows and communication processes in the future. A human resource software with an automated post-hire survey process can alleviate the burden of conducting surveys manually.

By proactively offering these communications, it should reduce the number of walk-ins, phone calls, and follow-up emails you receive from applicants who are checking on the status of their application. Human resource software for government with an *automated email follow-up component* can help you provide the level of quality communications applicants want, without overburdening your staff.



## ONBOARDING TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

A research study done by Hewitt Associates showed that companies that focused more resources and time on onboarding processes experienced higher levels of success with employee engagement. Many local governments know that they should be properly establishing and training their new employees, but unfortunately are understaffed and overwhelmed. As a result, instead of properly onboarding the new hire, they attempt to quickly introduce the employee to his assignments and hope he has the fortitude to be successful without extensive training or guidance.

If you want to create a cohesive team of employees with high job satisfaction, it starts from the moment the potential employee walks through the door for an interview. Here are a few ways you can improve recruiting and employee onboarding, and in turn increase employee engagement:

## ESTABLISH YOUR COMMUNITY CULTURE

The culture within your local government administration will impact whether new hires feel welcome, and whether employees enjoy coming to work each day. Make sure that interview candidates and new hires feel welcome from the first moment they interact with anyone in your administration. The goal is to let them know that they are a valued team member who has the power to make a difference in your community, and that you are happy to have them as part of your administrative team.

If part of your struggles involve the amount of paperwork that needs to be procured, distributed, signed, and filed with each new hire, consider a government HR software that allows for digital workflows of onboarding documentation, and automated routing. Such solutions can save human resource managers significant amounts of time, while speeding the onboarding process, and keeping personnel data secure.





## **MAKE IT EASY FOR NEW HIRES TO ASK QUESTIONS**

It is inevitable that questions will come up during the onboarding process, and you need to provide avenues for those questions to be answered. Some new hires might be too uncomfortable to speak up and ask questions, which is why you need to be proactive to let them know where to go and who they should talk to if they need help.

Tell them that managers and coworkers are always available to answer their questions. You might even assign a coworker as their mentor in the beginning, so they have a specific person they can turn to if a question arises.



## INTRODUCE THE TEAM

A new employee can feel a bit awkward sitting in the office if they haven't been introduced to the rest of the team. Take a moment to make introductions, and look for ways to involve other team members in the onboarding process. By utilizing members on their team, the new employee can develop a relationship with his new coworkers from the beginning.

It should be a high priority to integrate the new employee into the team as quickly as possible, because he will be happier and more comfortable with his job when he has made a few friends in the workplace.







## **INSPIRE PRIDE IN YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

One of the primary reasons that individuals seek employment in public service is out of a desire to make an impact in their community. Reinforce to the new hire how his specific job function and assignments help to support the over-arching goals of your community. The best way to set this expectation is right from the beginning during the application and recruitment phase.

Rather than recruiting for open positions using job descriptions, use performance profiles. Such tools recruit achievement-minded candidates. Explaining how the position supports the overall community's goals will help attract such motivated candidates. Then, when it comes time for the employee's annual performance review, evaluate his performance based on the same criteria outlined in the performance profile for consistency, relevancy, and to foster future goal-setting and motivation.

## SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS FOR DAILY TASKS AND JOB DUTIES

There is nothing worse than the feeling of boredom at work, and it can quickly kill a new hire's motivation if he sits around for the first few days waiting for a project to be assigned. Have activities ready for him from the beginning, and make sure that you are clear about the tasks that need to be completed each day.

Also, be sure that you have systems in place for training and skill improvement. If the employee starts on a task and finds that he is missing information that is needed to be successful, where should he go for help? Consider a mentorship program between new hires and tenured staff in the department. Such collaborations will foster knowledge transfers as tenured staff begin to reach the age of retirement.

## IMPLEMENT AN ONGOING FEEDBACK SYSTEM

Once the onboarding process is complete, you need to stay proactive to help the new hire continually grow and develop within his position. Don't neglect ongoing feedback and evaluations, because these are the moments where you can assess the person's progress and help him feel more satisfied with his job.

Implement a specific system that can be used to monitor his progress, and work with him to set achievable goals. An employee who is making progress and growing within your local government is more likely to stick around, which increases retention and overall job satisfaction.





# **YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEW EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING CHECKLIST**

Use the checklist below to ensure your new hire has everything he needs for success from day one through 30.

## BEFORE THE EMPLOYEE'S START DATE

Work with the necessary internal departments to ensure all the following are complete before the new employee's first day:

- Provide to the employee necessary on-boarding documentation, giving the employee time to return any documents that must be completed or signed. To mitigate paperwork, provide as much information digitally as possible. Onboarding documents should include:
  - Welcome letter.
  - Performance profile. Note this should be the same profile used when the position was advertised, and when the employee was interviewed to ensure expectations are aligned.
  - Employee handbook.
  - Office dress code policy.
  - Internet use policy.
  - Emergency contact form (to be kept on file with HR).
  - Health benefit options and enrollment forms.
  - Retirement plan information and enrollment forms.
  - Payroll, direct deposit, I-9 and other tax deduction paperwork.



- Confirm the new employee's start date, desk/office location.
- Confirm where the employee will park.
- Coordinate the production of keys, badges, and access cards, as needed.
- Depending on the employee's role, order business cards. Ideally the cards should be available by the employee's first day.
- Order the employee's nameplate, if necessary, ideally to be complete before the employee's first day.
- Clean and prepare the employee's office/desk/workspace.
- If the employee will need a computer, work with your IT department to have it set up at the employee's desk, with necessary software installed.
- Work with your IT department to install a desk phone, and/or issue a smart phone or tablet if needed.
- Confirm if the employee has any disabilities or impairments that will require special accommodations (e.g., handicapped parking, a screen reader, an ergonomic keyboard, etc.).
- If the employee will be driving or operating municipal vehicles, prepare the necessary paperwork.
- If the employee will be required to attend regular meetings, add the meetings to his/her calendar.
- Add the employee to any necessary email distribution lists.
- Schedule any training or introductory meetings with key personnel for the first two weeks.
- Communicate internally to any staff or departments who will need to be aware of the new employee, his/her role, and provide his/her contact information.

# THE FIRST DAY

Provide set-up instructions (if necessary) for the employee's: computer, email, desk phone, mobile devices, intranets, and any other software or hardware necessary for the employee's role.

Provide a tour of the office in which the employee will be working, pointing out key areas such as the restrooms, printer, fax machines, etc.

Explain the completion of timesheets for exempt employees.

Ensure the employee's direct supervisor meets with him/her, one-on-one, for a formal on-boarding discussion. This is an opportunity for the supervisor to:

- Communicate expectations.
- Answer initial questions.
- Provide an initial assignment.
- Explain the performance review and goal-setting process, and provide access to performance review software for goal tracking and analysis.

Provide building safety instructions and emergency protocols.

Schedule a one-on-one, or team lunch for the employee's first day. This will offer an opportunity for staff to get to know one another, and will make the new employee feel welcome.



## THE FIRST WEEK

Depending on the new employee's role, coordinate for a headshot to be taken, and ask your communications office to write and distribute a press release to appropriate media outlets.

Coordinate for a member of your team to take the new employee on a community tour, being sure to point out municipal buildings and department locations.

## AFTER THE FIRST MONTH

Send the employee a 30-day onboarding satisfaction survey. Be sure to use the feedback or suggestions to improve your processes moving forward.

## CONCLUSION

A successful hiring system is created when every aspect of the recruitment, hiring, and onboarding process is executed to the highest standards. Whether you are a human resources department of one, or dozens, you can establish workflows and tools that will attract and retain the most passionate, and talented people for your administration.

To ease the burden of manual processes, reduce paperwork, and expedite your hiring process, consider a local government human resource solution that can be customized to fit the needs of your local government. [Click here](#) to learn how CivicHR® can help you hire the best talent for your community.





## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR JONATHAN WIERSMA**

As the General Manager for CivicHR, Jonathan understands the challenges that human resource professionals in local government face when looking to recruit, identify, and hire the best talent in their community, for their community. Jonathan's primary focus at CivicPlus is on following the trends in the local government human resource landscape, and leading product enhancements for CivicHR to ensure the solution evolves as the needs of local government evolve. Jonathan holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration. He has over fifteen years of experience in software research and development, client service, product implementations, sales, and marketing.