

An Interview Guide for Hiring a Community Planner

This guide was developed by MCDP to assist your intermunicipal group in hiring a community planner. It will provide basic information to help you through the recruiting, selection, hiring, and employee orientation process. You may also consult the Government of Saskatchewan's Municipal Affairs website for additional publications related to community planning at <http://www.municipal.gov.sk.ca/Programs-Services/Community-Planning/District-Intermunicipal-Planning>.

For hiring a one-time planning consultant, follow the Request for Proposal (RFP) procedure as outlined in Saskatchewan Municipal Affairs Request for Proposals Guide. Decide on which proposals meet the criteria of your group and invite each candidate to provide a presentation to your group.

Tips for Advertising

When Advertising for a Community Planner:

- Describe your community group or organization, highlighting your best attributes: available services, amenities, and future potential.
- Outline the duties and expectations of the position and where it is located.
- Clearly indicate the employment requirements, such as education, years of work experience, professional designation, relocation to your vicinity (if required) and any other desired traits specific to your organization's goals.
- Provide a salary range, including the possibility of opportunity pay for a recent graduate to be increased after a certain period of time (if applicable). Also indicate what is included with the salary such as benefits, supplies, transportation, overtime hours, etc.
- Request references (3 – 4 contacts)
- Set a deadline for applications, i.e. one month.
- Broaden your recruitment base by advertising online and Canada-wide. You will achieve best results from soliciting professional planning associations such as the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP), the Association of Professional Community Planners of Saskatchewan (APCPS), and other provincial and municipal planning associations. Also, consider posting your job opportunity with university career centres, which are accessible to alumni.

Short-Listing Candidates

Prior to short-listing candidates, your organization should outline the criteria that the successful candidate should meet. For example, these criteria can include some combination of desired employee qualities (such as leadership, team worker, independent, etc.), work experience, education and professional designation. Each criterion may be weighted proportionately by your hiring committee.

Once your employment competition has closed, review submitted resumes and cover letters to determine which candidates best meet your criteria. Consider the following:

- Are the educational requirements met?
- Does the applicant hold a professional designation?
- What is their breadth of work experience and expertise?
- Does the cover letter and resume look professional? Pay attention to any spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors as clues to the applicant's attention to detail and communication abilities.
- Is the cover letter tailored to your advertisement? Does the applicant's personality come through their cover letter?

Establish an interview team, comprised of different members of your organization. A diverse interview team will provide you with differing perspectives on each interview candidate. Your interviewing team can share responsibilities during the interview, alternatively asking questions and taking notes. It is good practice to have a team leader to chair the interview process.

Conducting the Interview

To begin, provide your candidate with an overview of your organization and the expectations of the job. Interview questions should reflect the job requirements as advertised. It is a good practice to have your interview questions written out and to take notes of the applicant's responses. Anticipate any questions the applicant may have and be prepared to provide information and clarification. Refer to the applicant's resume and cover letter and ask them to expand on any particular aspect of interest to your hiring committee. The interview provides both the candidate and your organization an opportunity to learn more about each other. Being well-prepared and organized in conducting the interview leaves a positive impression with your job candidate.

Questions to Ask in the Interview:

1. Explain how your education and work experience pertain to the requirements of this position.

2. Are you currently registered with a Professional Planners Association? Are you currently a member of the CIP or APCPS?
3. What kinds of projects have you done in the past, particularly related to Official Community Plans (OCPs), zoning bylaws, concepts plans, bylaw amendment processes, development permits and subdivision approval processes?
4. Are you willing to relocate to this area or nearby vicinity?
5. Explain the planning and approval process for land use/development within the province of Saskatchewan.
6. Explain how you would engage/consult with our community. Provide an example of your best practices.
7. Elaborate on any experiences/knowledge you have had working with intermunicipal groups or/collaborative projects.
8. Please give examples of your experience with public speaking and public consultation. Have you ever given a presentation at a public hearing?
9. Provide an example of time when you had to deal with a difficult situation/difficult people. What did you do and what was the overall outcome? What would you do differently?
10. What additional experiences/attributes do you bring to this position? Please elaborate.
11. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
12. Describe your experience with timelines, multitasking, and working under stressful circumstances.
13. Will you be able to meet the expectations of the job, i.e., work attendance, special needs/considerations?
14. What are your current/future plans? Are you able/willing to commit to our community/organization to meet its goals?
15. Are you bondable?
16. Are you able to be politically neutral within the work environment?
17. What are your expectations of the job/work environment? Do you have any questions?
18. What would your previous employers say about you? May we contact your references? (Request three references with contact information if not yet provided with the resume.)

Any other questions specific to living in your community/or specific to the type of work that your community planner will be doing are also appropriate.

NOTE: Personal questions unrelated to the job are not permitted under the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Refer to their website for information on how to conduct an interview following human rights guidelines:

http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/publications/screening_employment-en.asp

Reference Checks and Security Clearance

After you have interviewed your job candidates, conducting a reference check will provide you with additional information about the candidate's work ethic, how they interact in a work setting, and their demonstrated strengths and weaknesses. This is an important component of the hiring process, to verify what the candidate has reported in the interview. Usually a combination of three to four professional and character references are suitable. The more information you have on the potential employee with regards to their work history, the more informed your decision will be.

Additionally, conducting a security or police record check will address any concerns you may have over the bond-ability of the potential employee. The applicant is normally responsible for providing a signed document from the RCMP indicating any criminal record. For greater efficiency, when inviting a job applicant for an interview, request that they bring a criminal record check with them to the interview.

Questions to Ask Employee References

Provide a brief summary of the organization and the position to the reference you are calling so they are able to give appropriate feedback on the candidate's abilities to fill the position.

1. Please tell me how you know (name).
2. Describe the type of work this person did with/for you and his/her capabilities.
3. How would you describe his/her work ethic?
4. Was your organization pleased with this individual's performance?
5. Would you recommend this person to work for our community/organization?
6. How would you define **their** relationship with stakeholders? Individuals in the work environment?
7. Is there anything else that we should know about their abilities to fill this position?
8. In your opinion, what are this person's strengths/weaknesses?
9. Any further comments/information would be appreciated.

When You've Made Your Decision: Job Offering and Negotiations

Once your hiring committee and job candidate have agreed to the details of the position, clearly indicate to the successful candidate in a letter of offer: the salary and benefits, work schedule/hours, overtime expectations, office location, start date, and length of term (if applicable). Make sure to address any questions from your candidate and iron out an agreement that meets both your needs. Ask the candidate to sign and return the letter of offer.

Job Orientation

Prepare an orientation package for your new community planner including the following information:

Internal processes

- Benefits and payroll information
- Office supplies, equipment, and technological services
- Your organization's Policy Manual (if applicable)
- Internal contacts for employment-related concerns and information
- Your community's administration and organizational structure
- Accommodation and services related to living in your community: real estate, shopping, schools, health services, protection services, recreation, etc.

Job-related processes and background information

- Community's background information including history, previously completed asset mapping, maps, reports, and studies; Intermunicipal Agreements, current Official Community Plan and Zoning Bylaws.
- External contacts of municipal government officials and agencies, local organizations, community networks in place, for information and procedures—anything relevant for completing the day to day aspects of the job.

Additional Resources

The following websites provide excellent interviewing tips for recruiting purposes.

Westminster Group

http://www.wgpeople.com/ec_einterviewgd.htm

University of Saskatchewan Human Resources

<http://www.usask.ca/hrd/manager/recruitment.php>