
Hiring the Director



One of the Board's most important responsibilities is hiring the director.

The needs of your library and your community will determine who will be the best person to fill the position. One Board may decide that imagination and energy are the most important characteristics the new director needs to have. Another Board might put more emphasis on administrative experience, while still others on education and library experience. Whatever combination of expertise and vision your Board determines is needed, the guiding directive should be that the Board is responsible for hiring the best candidate possible to direct the library.

The process of hiring a new director begins long before recruitment advertisements are placed. Although only local trustees and officials can determine the type of person they want and need as director, Boards must organize their search and gather the needed information to conduct a legal and productive recruiting campaign.

Below are suggested guidelines to assist the Board in hiring the director.

1. Know the law

Before recruiting and hiring a director, the Board should learn about federal and state laws concerning equal opportunity, affirmative action and the issues of confidentiality, public information and documentation as they apply to the hiring process. The city or county human resources department can help the Board with this as well as with the hiring process as a whole.

The Board can also ask the city or county attorney to provide information about the legal aspects of hiring. Ask the attorney to give a short presentation to the Board, with time for questions. Understanding these issues is vital to conducting a legal recruitment and hiring.

2. Develop a recruitment timeline

The details of the schedule can be prepared by the search committee, once it is appointed, but the Board should determine the timeline for the hiring process. Realistically, the entire process will take from two to five months.

Human Resources Standards and Services Bureau
<http://hr.mt.gov/hrservices/homehr.asp>

If the Board has plenty of advance notice (as in the case of a planned retirement, for instance), it is often possible to have a new director begin the day the previous director leaves. If the current director is leaving within a month of giving notice, the Board will need to appoint an acting director to serve while the recruitment process is under way. In this case, the Board needs to decide:

- Does it matter if the acting director will also likely be an applicant for the position?
- If the acting director is a current staff member, is he or she expected to handle the responsibilities of both positions?
- What is a fair salary for the acting director?
- How long do you anticipate the need for an acting director?

3. Develop a realistic budget

In developing a budget for the recruitment and hiring process, the Board needs to consider if and how much money is available to spend on:

- the acting director's salary
- advertisements (where and how often)
- out-of-town applicants' travel expenses for final interviews
- interviewing expenses, such as lunch with the Board
- long-distance telephone expenses for verifying applicant's employment history, level of education and references

4. Write a job description

Before recruitment begins, the Board needs to determine what exactly the director is to do and what qualifications are required. If the library has a job description for director on file, the Board should review this with the current director and update or revise it as necessary.

Librarianship is a technical, professional career. Even in the smallest library, the level of service, financial management, public relations activities and organization and selection of books and other materials all require some specialized knowledge and skill. Sometimes this expertise can be obtained through experience, but usually it is gained through formal education and training, leading to a master's degree in library and information science.

5. Determine salary range and benefits

Salary and benefits for the position of library director vary across Montana, depending on the resources of each community. The Board has the legal right

to set the director's salary and benefits. Considerations may include any or all of the following:

- Library budget
- Current director's salary and benefits
- Existing personnel policy and salary scales
- Policy and practices of the governing body (if applicable)
- Comparison of the salary structure of other local government employees with similar responsibilities and qualifications
- Negotiation, if necessary, with funding bodies to obtain the necessary funds to allow the library to pay an equitable salary for the level of expertise required

MCA 22-1-310
http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/mca_toc/index.htm

6. Establish a search committee

A search committee allows the community to become involved in the selection process. The size of the committee depends on the community, but seven or eight members allows representation of various segments of the community that have an interest in the library. Possible members are:

- at least two trustees
- a library staff member if there are at least three employees other than the director
- a city council member or county commissioner, depending on the governing structure of the library
- the president of the Friends of the Library and/or a member of the library foundation board, should those organizations exist in your community
- a school board member or school administrator
- one or two members of the community at large, such as a parent of a preschool library user and a representative from the chamber of commerce

The goal is to have good community and political involvement in the hiring process. That said, the Board needs to give clear guidance to the committee when the members are appointed. The Board chairperson often serves as the chair of the search committee.

The role of the committee is to do the planning, recruiting and initial screening of applicants. The Board should decide before the committee is appointed how much involvement it wants the committee to have in selection of finalists. The committee could be asked to interview finalists and make recommendations to the Board for first, second and possibly third choices.

Once formed, the search committee's tasks are as follows:

◆ **Round out the job description and qualification requirements**

A good place for the committee to start is by listing characteristics. For example:

Personal qualities: What kind of person do we want?

- enthusiasm
- willingness to work hard
- cooperative attitude
- service attitude
- friendliness
- leadership skills

Administrative skills: What kind of experience as an administrator and what kind of management training do we want applicants to have?

- budget preparation and administration
- personnel and volunteer management
- good communicator, with public speaking abilities and good writing skills
- time management skills
- computer skills
- facility management

Professional competencies: What does the director need to be able to do?

- Explain and implement the philosophy of public library service, including the concepts associated with intellectual freedom, as expressed in the Freedom to Read statement and the Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association.
- Understand and practice the principles of material selection and acquisition for library material in a variety of formats.
- Implement the cataloging and classification scheme used by the library (usually the Dewey Decimal Classification).
- Provide information service to the patrons of the library through an understanding of the reference interview process and the use of standard information or reference sources.
- Organize and conduct programs for adults, students and preschool children, as needed by the library.

◆ **Develop a detailed timeline**

Be realistic in preparing this timeline and then maintain the schedule if at all possible. If unforeseen delays do occur, the schedule should be revised and the public informed. Include in the timeline:

- Dates for recruitment advertising
- Date and time of application deadline
- Dates of application review period and recommendations made to the Board
- Approximate interview dates (at least “the week of...”)
- Target start date for new director
- Dates and times for search committee meetings (meetings should be scheduled well in advance so members can be available to accomplish the various tasks of the process)

◆ **Establish review criteria**

Establish the process and criteria by which the applications will be initially reviewed, based on the requirements determined in completing the job description. The Board can contact the city or county human resources department or attorney for assistance in developing review criteria. Some of the basic criteria used to screen applications might include:

- Submitted within the advertised deadline
- Inclusion of both resume and cover letter
- Completed application form (if form is necessary, be certain that it meets current legal requirements; for example, it cannot include questions about age, race, children, marital status, etc.)
- Basic educational requirements met and verified by the committee chair or a designated committee member
- Basic experience and reference requirements met and verified (This process is often conducted by calling each previous employer and reference, and asking specific, pre-determined questions. Replies should be noted on a form for each applicant.)

◆ **Establish ranking criteria**

Applicants meeting the basic review criteria will then be ranked by the committee, so the process and criteria for ranking must also be developed. At the very least, score sheets should be prepared for committee members to use to evaluate each applicant’s ability to meet the requirements in library and management ability, experience and knowledge.

◆ **Implement initial recruiting process**

After completing the previous steps, the search committee advertises the position, checks the basic qualifications and ranks the applicants according to the plan. It then meets and shares its rankings or scoring of the applicants, arriving at a consensus concerning its recommendations for finalists to be interviewed by the Board.

On occasion, the search committee might find that too few, or even no, applicants meet enough of the criteria for the committee to comfortably recommend finalists to the Board. If that is the case, the committee may want to recommend that the Board establish a new timeline and re-open the search with the same criteria and salary/benefits as before.

Or, perhaps the search committee might recommend that the Board review the job description and qualifications in light of the salary offered. The Board might need to take one of the following actions.

- Find a way to increase the salary and benefits to attract individuals qualified for the position.
- Reduce the qualifications to allow consideration of less-experienced or less-educated applicants. If the Board takes this course of action, it needs to rank—in order of importance—the skills, knowledge and qualifications it originally desired to avoid compromising in vital areas of need.
- Determine if it is possible to compromise on some of the qualifications if an applicant was willing to be hired as a trainee for a period of time, during which the individual would acquire specific skills or knowledge through formal classes, workshops or individual learning.

The Wrong Question

Due to federal law, certain questions cannot be asked of job candidates. Questions to avoid when interviewing candidates include:

- ✗ Age
- ✗ Date of birth
- ✗ Religion or church affiliation
- ✗ Father's surname or mother's maiden name
- ✗ Marital status
- ✗ What languages they speak (unless it is a job requirement)
- ✗ How many children they have, their children's ages and who will care for the children while applicant is working
- ✗ Financial information not related to compensation
- ✗ If they served in the military of any foreign country

◆ **Notify candidates and set up interviews**

After the search committee gives its recommendations for finalists to the Board, it then notifies the candidates and schedules interviews. The committee will also structure the interview process. It should always include:

- structured questions prepared ahead of time and asked of all candidates, to ensure they are all treated consistently
- standard evaluation sheet and scoring scheme
- adequate time for discussion, as the interview is a mutual evaluation process
- brief tour of the library

In addition, the search committee might arrange for some or all of the following activities to be part of the interview.

- Assessment exercises (use the library collection)
- Interview with the search committee (with a report and recommendations to be made by the committee to the Board)
- A social event such as a reception with local officials or simply lunch or dinner with the Board
- Tour of the community

7. Conduct the interviews

Once the search committee schedules and structures the interviews with the finalists, the Board conducts them.

As a trustee, you need to be knowledgeable about what you can and cannot ask during an employment interview. Your questions must be related to the job description and how the applicant will perform the job. For example, you may ask why the applicant left former places of employment and what kind of references the applicant would receive from former employers. You can also ask if there are hours or days that the applicant would be unavailable to work. But you cannot ask questions such as the applicant's age (see "The Wrong Question," on facing page).

Given the legal regulations affecting employment interviews, it is important that trustees follow the prepared questions when interviewing director finalists. Trustees are encouraged to consult with the city or county attorney or human resources department for additional interview guidelines.

8. Select the new director

The Board selects the new director through discussion and by ranking the candidates based on the predetermined selection criteria. In addition to reaching a consensus on their first choice, trustees should also determine their second and third choices at this point, in case the selected candidate turns down the Board's offer or the Board and candidate cannot reach an agreement about the terms of employment.

This phase of the hiring process includes the following steps.

- Make a verbal offer to the selected candidate, including salary, benefits, anticipated starting date and length of the probationary period, if any, followed by a verification of the offer in writing. If the candidate accepts the offer, ask for a written confirmation of acceptance and the specific terms.
- If the first candidate declines the offer, offer the position to the second candidate or consider options such as re-opening the position or reviewing the salary and qualification requirements.
- After receiving written confirmation of acceptance from the candidate, write all other candidates to thank them and inform them of your decision.
- Officially thank the search committee and all those involved in the hiring process.
- Take care of practical arrangements, such as providing assistance with the new director's relocation to your community, if applicable.
- Welcome the new director and introduce the individual to staff, local government officials and others in the community.

9. Notify the public

Before the new director begins work, the Board should send news releases to the local media and other appropriate organizations. The State Library should also be contacted.

10. Monitor the probationary period

A probationary period of six months to a year is common practice for new directors. The Board should informally evaluate the director's performance midway during this period, and then do a formal evaluation at the end of the probationary period to determine whether to retain or dismiss the director. Future evaluations should be done on an annual basis (see Chapter 10, Evaluating the Director).

Montana Library Certification Program

The Montana State Library Commission requires that library directors of libraries serving populations greater than 25,000 people have a graduate degree in library or information science. For communities with service area populations less than 25,000, library directors without a master's of library science degree must have professional certification as defined by the Montana Library Certification Program. To learn more about the program, or to receive a copy of the *Montana Library Certification Program Manual*, contact the State Library. The publication is also available on the State Library's web site.

Montana Certification Program Manual
<http://msl.mt.gov/slr/Certification/certman.pdf>

Local Boards may require certification of other staff as well. Trustees are also encouraged to participate in the program as continuing education is essential for ongoing development and enhancement of library services.

The goals of the Montana Library Certification Program are to:

- ◆ Improve library services throughout the state.
- ◆ Assist public library directors in meeting the library certification standard adopted by the State Library Commission.
- ◆ Encourage library directors, staff and trustees to acquire and improve their skills through basic and continuing education.
- ◆ Recognize those who continue to update their skills and knowledge to provide better library services.
- ◆ Improve the public image of librarians and libraries.
- ◆ Provide guidelines for Boards to use to select and retain personnel.

When a new director is hired, he or she should enroll in the Montana Library Certification Program. This requires the completion of an enrollment application and an enrollment fee. The library director will have three years to complete the required hours of continuing education credits.

Certification needs to be renewed periodically.