

Best Hiring Practices for Building a Great Team



OCT 1: ANNUAL MEETING Hybrid

OCT 2: FULL-DAY CONFERENCE

Killington Grand Resort & Conference Center

Best Hiring Practices for Building a Great Team



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Agenda

- Job description and organizational evaluation
- Bias, professionalism and respect
- Planning a candidate-centered process
- Screening
- Interviewing
- Reference checks and background checks
- Selection
- Extra considerations for police department hiring
- VLCT and other resources

Organization Evaluation

Do we need this position?

Should we change what it looks like, or how it is organized in our workforce?

Consider this position in the context of other workplace changes.

Job title?

Union or non-union?

Exempt or non-exempt?

Useful Job Descriptions

- Living document – update!
 - Gendered or exclusionary language?
 - Listed degrees or certifications truly required?
- Review - onboarding, performance review, at least annually
- Employee input and manager/HR/selectboard approval
- Describe essential functions, minimum qualifications, work conditions
- Roadmap to success/excellence:
 - Clarity and descriptive phrases re: expectations
 - Include “soft” skills, e.g. adaptability, collaboration, communication, problem solving, listening, initiative, etc

Acknowledge Your Biases



Professionalism and Respect

- *Everyone* is a customer, so polite professionalism throughout
- Disclose general process and approximate timing
- Timing is key – avoid losing best candidates to a slow process

Plan a Candidate-centered Process

- Best application process from candidates' viewpoints?
 - Does ours discourage or lose good candidates?
- Hiring committee? Decision makers vs input providers?
Training? Union contract or policy?
- Where to post? (VLCT website – it's free!)
- Employee referral?
- Salary transparency law – effective July 1, 2025
- Disclose special processes – e.g. drug testing, background check, occ med physical
- Accessibility – ADA considerations
- **CONSISTENCY**

Application Form

- Best practice – obtain for all; allow “see resume”
- Prior employers and experience
- Disclose family relationships/potential ethics or policy implications
- Credentials - education, licenses, certifications
- References – permission to contact
- Attest to accuracy – signature
- “Ban the box”
 - Cannot ask on application about criminal convictions
 - Exception for public safety positions

Plan Screening and Interviewing

- Conduct initial screen and eliminate all who don't meet minimum qualifications
- Committee rank remainder; decide how many to interview
- Consider pre-screening:
 - Narrow the “Maybes”
 - Identify “B list”
 - Ensure top candidates are viable - pay, serious interest, relocation
- Structure the interviews – who, where, when
- Think through candidate communications

Interview Tips

- Train interviewers
- Prepare: structure interview, prepare question set, review applications in advance
- First round by phone or video?
- Focus on job-related experience, skills, competencies
- Be consistent, but delve into unique experiences
- Be open to transferrable skills and trainable talent
- Don't telegraph the answer you want
- "Sell" the municipality as a great place to work;
YOU are being evaluated too!

Interview Questions

GOAL: obtain the most useful information to help evaluate candidates

- Behavioral – past predicts future
- Competency-based – ability to use certain tools
- Open-ended – avoid yes/no
- Follow-up questions
 - Ask candidate to expand on short answers; get info you need
- Observe job-related interactions
- Explain municipality's goals and challenges
 - Be honest, but not overwhelming

Okay to ask?

Have you ever been out on workers' comp?

Are you married?

When do you plan to retire?

Will you take our health insurance?

If we offer you this job, when can you start?

Do you have a valid driver's license?

When is your baby due?

Okay to ask?

What kind of accent is that?

Do you have reliable childcare?

Are you able to work the required hours?

Are you in good health?

Can you lift 25 pounds above your head?

What is your astrological sign?

What are your pronouns?

Behavioral Question Examples

- Tell us about a time when you dealt with a member of the public who was upset and angry. How did you handle it? What did you learn?
- Please give an example of a time you disagreed with your boss. Describe the situation and how you dealt with it.
- Describe a mistake you made at work. What did you learn? What would you change if you could re-do it?
- Describe a time when you had to get up to speed very quickly with new information. What techniques did you use? How well did they work?

Competency-based Question Examples

- Please describe your experience with Excel. What have you used it for? What are the most advanced features you've used? Have you used graphing, pivot tables, etc.?"
- Which tools do you use in your current job? What training have you had in proper use of [insert forklift, power tools, 10-wheel plow truck, office machinery, etc.]? Describe your experience and comfort level.
- What (job-specific) licenses have you obtained?
- What would your colleagues say are your professional growth areas?

Open-ended Question Examples

- Instead of: “Are you a team player?”
“Describe a situation where you may not have gotten much credit but you made a real difference in the results of your team or department.”
- Instead of: “Are you organized?”
“What tools do you use to stay on task? How do you keep track of multiple pieces of multiple projects you are working on? What is your ideal workspace?”
- Instead of: “Do you like dealing with the public? “
What aspects of your current position do you enjoy the most? Why? Which ones would you delegate if you could?”

Pre-employment Testing

- Must be a reliable measure of skills/knowledge REQUIRED for the position
- “Job related and consistent with business necessity”
 - e.g. keyboard test; spreadsheet creation; presentation skills demo; physical agility testing
- Personality testing?
- Provide reasonable accommodation, when requested
- Never use a test to screen out those with disabilities or other protected categories
- Require of all at the same stage in your process – never just those you think might have trouble passing.
- Pre-offer medical exams not allowed under ADA; need conditional offer of employment
- Avoid disparate impact

Internet and Social Media Searches

- Be mindful of protected categories
- LinkedIn vs. personal social media
 - Be careful about learning things you don't want to know
- Search should be handled by designated person not making the hiring decision, who supplies only *job-related* info
- Vermont social media law:
 - Cannot request passwords or have someone log in

Reference Checking

- *Always* check multiple professional (not personal) references
- Supervisors whenever possible
- Use a form for consistency
- Tell reference about the job duties and requirements
- Explore areas where you may have lingering doubts
- Helpful question: “If we hire this person, what can we do to help her or him be successful in this role?”
- Letters of reference?
- What if I know someone at their former employer?
Can I call and get “the real story”?

Background Check

- For positions that interact with vulnerable populations:
VT Crime Information Center <https://vcic.vermont.gov/>
- Criminal background checks-law enforcement and some other positions with job relevance
- Hire a reputable firm; they will guide you re: Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) requirements

Background Check - Risk Management

- Obtain and use information wisely
- If problems are uncovered, consider:
 - Job-relevant?
 - How serious?
 - How long ago?
 - Has candidate grown? Acknowledged errors and learnings?
- Risk of discrimination vs. risk of disparate impact

Background Check – Police Department

- Comprehensive background investigation
- Determine that candidate has good moral character, impeccable credibility and nothing in their past that could impact the ability to be a police officer
- All candidates requiring training at the Vermont Police Academy must undergo a polygraph examination, psychological assessment, and physical fitness assessment.

Background Check – Police Department

- Per [20 VSA § 2362a](#) – if an applicant has previous law enforcement experience, the hiring agency must contact all former agencies to determine why the applicant no longer works there, or, if still employed, obtains a written analysis of the officer's performance.
- An applicant must sign a specific waiver for this process, and cannot be hired if they refuse
- A former law enforcement agency must provide the requested information

Special Considerations - PD

- The hiring entity, not the police academy, has the obligation to make certain an applicant has the potential to succeed in the law enforcement training environment
 - Reading / writing
 - Physical fitness
 - Stress management
 - Vehicle operation
 - Firearms handling

Wash-up Meeting

- Close in time following final steps
- Collect all evaluation materials and have a final meeting with those involved
- Use rating sheets?
- Go through each candidate and discuss pros and cons
- Document the bases for the decision

Final Selection Tips

- Top candidate may decline, so ideal to have plans B and C
- If some missing piece in skill set, can it be readily attained with training or coaching?
 - If yes, make sure you provide that support for success!
- When you have significant doubts, **do not hire.**
- Evaluate your search process
 - Compensation or other factors?
- Start over

Pre-employment Drug/Alcohol Testing

- Testing permitted only after offer of employment **contingent upon negative drug test result**
 - Don't wait for the first day of work to test
- CDL drivers-strict federal legal requirements
- VLCT-PACIF Commercial Motor Vehicle Operations Manual
- Model Drug and Alcohol Policy
- If positive drug test result, *do not hire*. Must provide:
 - Test results
 - Info about treatment opportunities, e.g. EAP brochure
 - All PACIF members have InvestEAP available

Some Hiring Basics

- If using employment contract – get legal assistance
- Written offer letter—title, salary or hourly wage, supervisor name, benefits, exempt vs. non, start date, probationary period, how often paid – this is usually NOT an employment contract
- Probationary/Introductory period - how long?
- Hiring packet in advance -- benefits, I-9, W-4, holiday list, paid leave info, sexual harassment policy, employee handbook (acknowledge receipt), etc.
- Other info to help with first day—arrival time? whom to ask for? parking? bring lunch/take out to lunch first day? dress code? important procedures?
- Use new hire checklist
- Plan comprehensive onboarding

Rejection – a.k.a. “not this time”

- Remember everyone is your customer
- Contact all interviewees
- Send emails or letters to other candidates (unless already handled through prior acknowledgement process, and they expect to hear further only if interviewed.)
- Be sincere; thank folks for their time and interest

Welcome and Onboarding

- Message: *We are delighted to have you!*
- Provide tools, information, and equipment to do the job safely and well.
- Onboarding – Think through and plan schedule
 - What does the employee need to acclimate, gain competence, be part of your team? First week? First month? First 60—90 days?
 - Include: introductions; communications; meetings; trainings; cross-trainings; shadowing/mentoring, etc.
 - Follow through!

VLCT Resources

- Job Description Toolkit

<https://www.vlct.org/resource/job-descriptions-toolkit>

- Hiring Toolkit (includes hiring checklist)

<https://www.vlct.org/resource/hiring-toolkit>

- **Training - Workplace Matters**

Employee Engagement, Thurs, Nov. 14, 2024, Noon to 1:00 pm

- CMV Operations Toolkit – includes manual and forms

<https://www.vlct.org/resource/commercial-motor-vehicle-cmv-operations-toolkit>



Police Department Hiring Resources

Developed by Dept of Public Safety, upon direction of state legislature:

Law Enforcement Officers

[Recruitment hiring recommendations APR2021.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#)

Chief of Police

[Chief hiring APR2021.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#)



More Resources

EEOC <https://www.eeoc.gov/prohibited-employment-policiespractices>

Fair Credit Reporting Act

<https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/plain-language/pdf-0142-background-checks-what-employers-need-know.pdf>

Bias - Harvard's "Project Implicit"

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Job ads - automated gender bias check:

<https://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com/>

<https://www.eploy.co.uk/resources/toolbox/check-my-job/>

QUESTIONS?

Upcoming Events:
Workplace Matters: Employee Engagement
November 14, 12p-1p (virtual)

<https://www.vlct.org/training-events-calendar>



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