

## Hiring an On-Site Manager

There is no universal way to determine which associations need an on-site manager, but size seems to be the primary indicator—whether that be based on number of units, budget, amenities or staff. Generally, associations with more than 1,000 units or annual budget above \$1 million almost certainly require an on-site professional.

Another important factor is amenities. Does the association have a golf course, lakes with boat ramps, food and beverage operations, club houses with activity centers or similar facilities? Those all require daily on-site management.

Also, how many staff members does the association employ? An association with only two or three employees might not have the need for an on-site manager; however, large associations with 10, 20 or more usually need one.

In general, large associations have more maintenance and capital reserve obligations and more pressing daily management needs than small associations. They also require the administrative, financial and political skills of an on-site manager.

Manager turnover within community associations can be high if boards hire the wrong type of manager. If the fit isn't right, talent is wasted and organizational energy dissipates. Hiring the right professional requires a specialized approach that will give associations an opportunity to assess the nature of the managerial position that best meets the needs of the association, and to define the qualifications a candidate must have to achieve the association's vision.

Board members should be prepared to conduct a manager search by establishing a schedule, involving homeowner committees, budgeting for the

process and arranging interim management while carrying out the search.

Professional certifications, designations and licenses are essential qualifications for a large-scale or on-site manager. Applicants should be screened carefully to ensure that they possess the necessary qualifications and pass all background checks.

The hiring process is a two-way transaction—not only is the association looking for the best candidate, but highly qualified managers are looking for the best associations to work with as well. The board will have to sell the association to top candidates. Interviews serve a number of purposes, provide important information to both parties and should be conducted systematically to evaluate candidates' equitably.

An agreement that lists all terms of employment should be prepared by the association attorney, negotiated with the top candidate and signed before the new manager's first day on the job. Be sure to document each stage of the process, and keep all applicants informed of the progress.

Ensure the new manager's success by establishing good performance criteria, delegating appropriately and honoring the basic distinctions between boards, managers, employees and friends.

Good communication is key to a strong working relationship between the board and manager. Putting reporting relationships and communication channels in writing—in the board policy and the written employment agreement—protects all parties. Board members should be excited at the prospect to see the community through a new pair of eyes, and work toward a healthy partnership with the manager from the start.