“Connecting the Dots” with your Cover Letter

May 23, 2024
A Little Bit About Us

Peckham & McKenney
Executive Search

• Formed in 2004
• “All about fit”
• Only serve municipal government
• Recruiters are retired City Managers, Assistant City Managers, Department Heads and Police Chiefs
A Little Bit About Us

Anton “Tony” Dahlerbruch, Retired City Manager

- Worked over 30 years in 6 cities in a variety of positions, 2 cities as City Manager (total of 12 years)
- Started as an Intern
- Former President of CalCities, City Managers Department

Diana Bishop, Retired Police Chief

- Worked over 36 years in local government law enforcement.
- Rose through the ranks at her first department, then selected as Police Chief at her second department, where she served for 9 years
The Basics to Consider

• Who is looking at you
  • The Process
Who’s looking at you?

Consider Your Audience

Why?

• Initial Reviewer – Recruiter or Human Resources
  • Screening and separating (weeding out)
  • Average review length – 20-60 seconds per application
  • Reviewing 10, 50, 100 for each position they have open

• Second Reviewer – Department, City Manager or City Council
  • Looking at the top candidates

• Third Reviewer – The Oral Board Panel
  • They might only have a few minutes to review before your interview.
The Process

There are 2 parts of the application process:
  Part 1: Your presentation of you; the cover letter and resume
  Part 2: Who you don’t know that you are competing against

The goal with your Cover Letter and Resume: to be invited to the next stage of the process

- Present yourself in an honest manner.
- Present yourself as having the experience and having performed in the capacity of the position, not aspiring to the role.
- Don’t wait until the last minute to apply.
- Customize.
- There is no harm in calling the Recruiter to talk before you apply.
  - Talk about the position
  - Be honest about your interest and background.
- The point with each step in the process is to get to the next step. Aim for the home run but get to first base. You will not get the position by simply a cover letter and resume; the goal with them is to get the first interview. (From the first interview, the goal is to get a second interview, etc.).
Your Cover Letter
Cover Letter

- Very important.
- Use a professional letter format and font.
- Address it to the hiring authority.
- Explain gaps in service or short tenure.
- One page is enough. Sometimes 1.5 pages is also fine.
- Make it compelling. It’s supposed to be a page turner. Leave them wanting to learn more about you.
- Personalize it; AI isn’t a help here.
- Do not include your home address (instead, just the City you reside in).
- Connect the dots, don’t repeat your resume.
Your cover letter is a peek at your personality, experience and writing skills

• What you're applying for and where
  • Example: Please accept my resume for the ....
  • Or I am pleased to submit my resume for ......

• Who, What and Where are you?

• Connect your skills to the brochure/job flyer; connect the dots
  • Pick some key words
  • Relate your skills/experience to the flyer
  • The hiring process is about the agency, what you provide them

• Your added value to the agency

• Wrap up well
  • Tell them what you value about this opportunity or what you value in your career path
  • Tell them what you bring to the table
  • Tell them why they are special to motivate you to support them
Specifically,

- **Short Term Employment**
  - Stints of less than 2 years
  - Short term stints create questions such as:
    - Did they leave willingly or were they asked to leave?
    - Why can’t this person hold a job for a longer period of time?
    - No staying power
    - How is it possible for this person to have this experience in a short period of time?
  - Add a bullet explaining why you left
    - Recruited for new lateral/promotional opportunity
    - Spouse/Partner got new position requiring us to relocate

- **Gaps In Employment**
  - Often easily explained
  - Can be explained in your cover letter or in a bullet
  - Keep the explanation as positive as possible
Greetings Mayor (name),

Please accept this as my letter of interest for the position of City Manager of (city). As an experienced professional with over xx years of experience managing people, projects, and budgets, I am well prepared to serve as (city) next City Manager.

My local government career spans xx years, the last xx years of which I have served in (city) executive leadership team as Assistant City Manager. Prior to joining the City of (name), I spent xx years in the private sector managing teams of all levels of the organization. This experience has carried through to specialized assignments in (city).

My accomplishments include serving as the City’s (title) which has led to __________. I have overseen the (city) budget development process, coordinating with all departments to bring a XXX dollars balanced budget forward to the City Council for adoption. I have also partnered with the City’s legislative representatives to bring more than $x million to the City in the past three years and grant funds to support City-wide projects. To re-establish the City’s corporate culture, I launched and led XXXX to enhance bring the City employee team to a better emotional state with a higher level of job satisfaction. I also led the City’s website redesign and serve as the City’s Public Information Officer.

I have earned a Master’s Degree in Public Administration from XXXX, attended the New and Future City Managers Seminar and completed the Municipal Financial Management Program among other professional certifications described in my resume.

I bring existing relationships with City staff, the City’s partner agencies, non-profit organizations, Chamber of Commerce, and service organizations, which will allow me to “hit the ground running.” Although, I bring a fresh perspective to the City with a focus on data informed decision making and metric focused management.

I am excited to be considered for this opportunity and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Return Address

Date

Mayor (name) and Vice Mayor (name)
and Members of the City Council
Address

Dear Mayor (name) and Members of the City Council,

I am excited to submit my resume for consideration to be (position).

As a long-time City employee, I have the insight to lead the City into the future while bringing a fresh vision. My experience working with and negotiating with businesses positions me well to implement the City's xxxx and bring innovative xxxx strategies to enhance the community for xxxx. Additionally, managing the City's budget development and delivering a balanced budget to the City Council that honored the trust bestowed by the community has been a highlight for me.

Throughout my career, I have prioritized communication, starting my career in public relations, to now serving as the City's xxxx and currently leading the xxxx. These experiences have provided me with the opportunity to lead and inspire individuals and teams.

I offer established relationships with the City's state and national elected officials and their staffs and xxx These partnerships have resulted in millions in directed funds and grants over the past three years for City-wide projects as well as legislative attention to sales tax issues impacting the City. Through all of my experience, I have a track record of implementing Council priorities and directives.

I bring value through my existing relationships with City staff, the City's partner agencies, non-profit organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, and service organizations. This will aid in a smooth transition from the current City Manager and provide continuity to the organization and community.

I am excited to be considered for this opportunity and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Before you hit send...

1. Check the grammar & spelling
2. Check the address & your salutation
3. Check the name of the City and the title for the position
Again,

DON’T FORGET

PROOFREAD

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What you present is the first impression you make.

Remember

• Only one person can get the job
• Be persistent
• Be honest
• Hone your skills
• Never stop updating your resume
• Elevate your resume & cover letter
• Practice interviewing
Peckham & McKenney Webinar Series

Acing the Interview
Thursday
August 15, 2024
QUESTIONS?

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Questions?