



Use of the selection process versus the election process will help you reduce liability issues related to improper decision-making and help make your selection a successful one.

Selection vs. Election:

Understanding the importance
of the process



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Ensuring that the right person is in the right position to lead is critical to maintaining the safety of the members of the department, as well as reducing liability exposures.

I. When election time rolls around

Uncertainty often surrounds a department executive when placing a new slate of officers into position. This uncertainty may stem from the potential flaws in election processes, which have a propensity to turn into popularity contests that do not reflect the actual needs of the department. Furthermore, the department executive may fear that he or she has a lack of control over an election process, as opposed to when the executive appoints an individual through a proper selection process. Ensuring that the right person is in the right position to lead is critical to maintaining the safety of the members of the department, as well as reducing liability exposures.

CIRMA has experienced several claims that were related to poor operational decision making or inaction that have had effects on direct and indirect costs, such as higher claim payouts, employee turnover, loss of productivity, reduced morale and lack of confidence in leadership. These events can also lead to large loss claims in Workers' Compensation as well as Liability, Auto and Property lines of insurance in both emergency and non-emergency situations. Several of these examples are cited in the Fire Service Hot-Zone series released by the CIRMA Fire Service Task Force.

II. Nominations are just not enough any longer

As a former chief once explained, *"A good leadership team has an ongoing process of officer recruiting, officer education, and officer assessment."* To that point, some departments delegate elections to a nominating committee that convene in advance of officer elections. That process, although spearheaded by membership or governance committees, can still unfortunately be swayed by personal influences. The proper step that this committee should take is to work on an ongoing basis to identify and address the knowledge and skills gaps in the department. Through that committee, the department ensures that its composition and performance are aligned with organizational needs.

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Many departments are driven by either By-laws or Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) that dictate the process for the installation of officers within their department through an *election* process. Understanding that these governing guidelines must be followed, departments under these processes should make every possible effort to uphold a *true nominating committee* with defined goals. Part of those goals should ensure that the process has consistency, competency and fairness for all prospective candidates.

Consistency - The ability to have the same selection process for each and every member that aspires to attain a position as an officer in the department. This may be attained through standardized questions, scene evaluations, role-play examples with grading scores that reflect proper and improper responses. This can create a fair process to reduce the likelihood of employment practice liability lawsuits, such as failure to promote.

Competency - The ability to evaluate situational awareness and problem solving skills with grading scores that reflect proper and improper responses. For example, if a candidate replies with a less than sufficient response related to the situation that they are posed with, it is an indicator of their inability to think globally related to the incident. On a live scene, this could be detrimental to the operation and create large liabilities for the organization. Conversely, if the individual replies with a proper response, it demonstrates a level of knowledge that can put the organization at a comfort level related to the department actions on scene. The negative consequences by having the improper person in the leadership role may lead to undesired outcomes for the municipality.

Fairness - One of the most common questions that are raised is, *"What qualifications does XXX have that are superior to mine?"*. By using a standardized program, it will allow for each and every candidate to start on a level playing field. It then allows for the administration to select the candidates with the best responses. By establishing an appointment process, this helps minimize the liability over the selection process and allows for a structured response to any request regarding

Consistency, competency and fairness, along with proper documentation, are all aspects that should be considered when making your appointments.

the administrative decision on any appointment.

For additional questions or concerns regarding this process, please consider directing questions to the CIRMA Employment Practices Liability Helpline or to the town's Employment Practices Attorney. Please contact CIRMA Risk Management for assistance.

III. Building a Department Selection Process

Among the many needs in any department, the need for qualified officer leadership should be among the most important. Recruiting or *selecting* the right members will help cultivate good organizational leadership in the long run. Beyond skill sets, members need to bring willingness and capacity to step into critical leadership roles, ensuring organizational stability and effectiveness. An effective officer selection process is strategic and incorporates forward thinking about future leadership needs and support for the department mission statement. Each department may have their own process; however, there should be a foundation as to determining one candidate's qualifications over another. When choosing an individual, an emphasis on the importance of officer selection should be made clear to the candidate as this is a critical step. *"The department officer(s) should serve as a go-to team player, not to mention the person who evaluates and gives feedback to the chief executive officer. Officer selections are critically important to the organizational stability, yet it is always hard to get people to step up."* One of the most critical steps in this process is to design a process for an officer succession plan. Creating this process through which members engaged in ongoing education that creates a culture of mentoring, so each officer is responsible for preparing others to step forward in future selection processes.

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Willingness is a key factor in the officer selection process. In fact, it's behind four critical questions that should be asked of all candidates that member considers paramount in the selection process:

- Who has time (to stay engaged in the process)?
- Who demonstrates consistent commitment to serving the best interests of the organization?
- Who has the certification required to be in the leadership role?
- Who has the willingness to assist in leading the organization?

IV. Proper Selection Process

Once the department succession plan has been developed and the desired individuals have been chosen, the selection process can then be started. This process should be established and consist of standard requirements or certifications defined by the department executive officers. These requirements or certifications can vary from department to department based on size of membership, geography, type of equipment and service provided and other variables within the municipality being served.

1. A series of test questions should be administered related to the departments' policies and procedures to establish a baseline grade for all candidates. Questions should be related to other areas of operation related to mission statement, values, public relations and other areas non-operational related.
2. A series of role –play events based physical hands on skills or scenario based questions that can be graded equitably with both positive and or negative grading.
3. One on one oral interview to assess the level of individual commitment or *"willingness"* to perform the duties of the officer position they intend to hold.

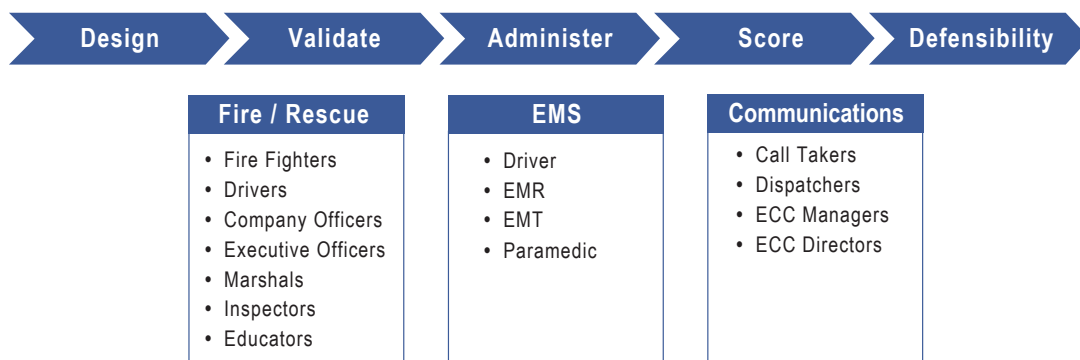
Once the individuals have met the above listed criteria, he/she will now qualify for the desired position. As any candidate knows, once there is competition for the position based on criteria, the candidates are more willing to comply and compete with program guidelines.

The documentation of the above listed results play a key role in supporting the overall selection process. These *"grades"* become the supporting documentation to assist when liability claims

For additional information on this topic, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant.

are raised. As a chief executive officer you may be called to justify your decision of either selecting or not selecting an individual for an appointment as an officer. Without record retention of this critical information, you and your municipality are open to potential public official liability. Understanding that some departments may be bound to an *election* process over a *selection* process through by-laws or SOPs, this process can be added prior to the election process as a requirement to be considered for a position by the nomination committee.

An example of the CIRMA recommended process:



Written Tests	Assessment Centers	Day-in-the-Life Assessment	Structured Panel Interview	Practical Skills	Accomplishments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measures candidate's knowledge Based on relevant source material Content valid Customized or off the shelf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple, realistic and relevant simulations Administrative Writing Leadership Presentations Role play Customized or off the shelf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Realistic Continuous Simulate true day-in-the-life of officer, supervisor, manager or director positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stand-alone situational interviews Key job competencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills oriented Hands-on Practical skill set Multiple task stations Measurement of key skills performed set Multiple task stations Measurement of key skills performed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oral interview allows for persuasion of panel based on education, experience, training and competencies. Candidate uses their verbal and written skills to sell themselves.

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