

Local Government Employment Application Tool

Hints and tips for drafting a competitive
employment application for Local Government

Introduction

The State, Local Government and community sectors have a significant focus on equity and merit-based selection processes and, as such, require applicants submit a cover letter, resume and often a response to key selection criteria.

Council selection panels assess applications on the basis of the cover letter, resume and often response to key selection criteria. By omitting the response to key selection criteria you may be deemed not to have submitted a complete application. This may mean you are screened out immediately or, at the very least, you will be disadvantaged against other candidates who have, in competition with you, submitted a full application. By submitting a complete, well-structured and composed application, you substantially increase your chances of being successful in securing the position.

Below you will find some guidelines and tips to assist you in composing your best application. Good luck with your application.

Write your resume

Your resume is the first glimpse of your personality Council gets to see. Your resume should therefore reflect you and the image you want to portray.

Your resume (or Curriculum Vitae “CV”) outlines your experience, knowledge and skills, and is one of the key sources of information Council will use to assess your suitability for employment.

Therefore, your resume should be tailored for each application, and should present relevant information. To ensure your resume catch's the interests of the recruiter, it should be:

- Contemporary – include current information
- Succinct – restrict your resume to 2 to 3 pages
- Logical – present information in a logical way and include headings
- Chronological – present information chronologically
- Represent your Personal Brand – present your resume in a way which represents your personal brand; and
- Honest – include accurate information which truly represents your skills and experience.

There are a number of ways to prepare your resume. As a guide, you should include:

Personal Details

Include all personal details you want Council to know and use to contact you, including:

- Full name (and preferred name)
- Residential address
- Contact number (mobile number)
- E-mail address; and
- Details of any mandatory requirements specified in the position description, such as drivers licence or Working With Children check.

Do not include:

- Date of birth
- Nationality
- Marital status
- Gender; nor
- Children or carers responsibilities.

Ask yourself:

- What does my email address say about me? Is it professional?
- Am I comfortable with a recruiter hearing my phone message bank?

Career Objective

Including your “career objective”, while optional, can be a great way to focus your resume and direct attention to your relevant skills and attributes for the position you are applying for by giving the reader an idea of your career direction.

Provide information that shows that obtaining this position is a strategic component of your long term career plan.

A career objective can be in sentence or point form.

For example:

“With a background in professional writing, editing and corporate communications, I have recently commenced studying a Masters in Policy. I wish to secure a position in Council, where I can develop my policy and consultation skills and inspire a new generation to be passionate about providing services to the community.”

- Demonstrate your passion
- Demonstrate how you’re moving your career; and
- Align your career direction with the aspirations of Council.

Education

Highlight your educational achievements by listing completed relevant education and formal qualifications in reverse chronological order.

Include:

- Full name of the tertiary institution (e.g. University of Melbourne, not Melb Uni)
- Full name of course (e.g. Bachelor of Laws)
- Date of completion/expected completion; and
- Any notable achievements (e.g. scholarships and awards)

If you are a student, newly graduated, or it is specifically requested in the position description, consider including secondary education results.

Unless specifically requested, do not scan your qualifications or transcripts and include in your application. You may want to consider bringing originals with you to the interview for review by the selection panel.

Employment History

It is critical to the success of your application that you succinctly and logically present all relevant employment history.

You do not need to list all your previous positions, but should explain any gaps in service if not evident.

Include:

- Position title
- Name of Council/organisation/company
- Duration of employment
- Key elements and responsibilities of the role; and
- Highlight any key achievements.

It is important to:

List your previous employment in reverse chronological order

- Use plain English
- Be concise
- Be factual; and
- Do not use undefined acronyms.

Keep in mind, your resume may be used to assess your communication skills. It therefore needs to be understood to be effective and should not include large slabs of text.

Other Training/Professional Development

You may want to include other relevant training or development activities such as conference attendance, licenses, short courses or professional development which is highly relevant to the position you are applying for. List the training or development, institution or organisation, the date completed and no more than a one line description.

Community Engagement

Evidence of community engagement and volunteering is considered valuable by Councils. Include the organisation you volunteered for, your role, the period of engagement and any key achievements.

Professional Memberships

List any professional associations or memberships. Include the association or group, the level or type of membership, and year joined.

Personal Interests

A discrete and brief list of personal interests is a quick way to engage interest and intrigue and provide a picture of you as an individual. However, only include appropriate interests (e.g. competitive sports, professional 20 words or less competitor).

Referees

Referees are critical to the success of your application. Council will scrutinise the referees you include (and do not include) in your application.

You should include at least two employment related referees. If you do not have a professional referee, identify an academic or personal referee from a club or volunteer association.

Include:

- Referees name
- Their position in the company/organisation
- Your relationship (e.g. previous manager)
- Contact number and email address; and
- Do not identify friends or associates as referees.

Referees will not be contacted without your consent. You should brief your referee on the position you are applying for so they are able to consider examples of how you meet the required behaviours and key selection criteria.

Write Your Cover Letter

Motivate Council to read your resume and request an interview by preparing an engaging and confident cover letter which compliments your resume.

Your Council application should be accompanied by a cover letter tailored to the position you are applying for.

The cover letter is an opportunity for you to introduce yourself, demonstrate your interest in Council and the specific position, and motivate Council to read your resume with interest.

Therefore, your cover letter should be:

- Tailored – to the position you are apply for (Council can tell when you don't)
- Formal - use business letter format
- Enthusiastic – show your enthusiasm for the position and Council; and
- Confident – in your experience and ability to perform the position.

Ask yourself, do I really want this position? If you answer yes, take the time to prepare an engaging cover letter.

You should consider including the following information:

Personal details

Similar to your resume, you should include your contact details at the beginning of the letter, including your:

- Full name (and preferred name)
- Residential address
- Contact number (mobile); and
- Email address.

You should also:

- Identify the date the cover letter was prepared at the top of the letter
- Include the name and address of Council
- Address the letter to the recruiter identified on the position description; and
- Include the position title you are applying for.

Purpose of the letter

Indicate the purpose of the cover letter in your opening paragraph.

If replying to an advertisement, including the reference/job number.

Capture attention by sounding enthusiastic about the position and working with Council.

Why you want the position

Explain to Council why you want the position.

Highlight how your qualifications and experience make you the right candidate for the position.

The details you provide should show you have done your research and understand what the position entails.

Briefly identify the Key Selection Criteria

In your content, briefly identify the key selection criteria. Do not answer the key selection criteria in depth, as this should be done in your formal answer to the key selection criteria. Rather, draw the recruiter's attention to your response in your resume and key selection criteria.

Identify your generalist skills

List your generalist skills, such as interpersonal and communication skills, teamwork, innovation etc. and provide examples from your experience.

Highlight your specialist skills

Briefly describe the specialist skills (e.g. relevant qualifications, experience and achievements) you offer and bring to Council and the position.

Provide brief examples to support your claims.

Call to action

Conclude your cover letter with a call to action.

For instance, "Thank you for taking the time to consider my application. I look forward to the opportunity to meet with you to explain why I am the right candidate for the position."

Presentation is everything

The way you present your cover letter and resume is equally as important as the content.

Your cover letter should:

- Be no longer than one A4 page with reasonable margins
- Not use below size 10 font (Arial size 10 or 11 is easy to read)
- Avoid abbreviations, jargon and slang; and
- Be presented in short and concise sentences in plain English.

Your resume should:

- Be no longer than two to three pages for students and new graduates without significant work experience; and

- Be no longer than three to six pages for senior level roles.

Grammar and Spelling

Incorrect spelling and grammar in your resume and cover letter indicates to the recruiter you haven't put time and effort in to your application.

Ensure 100% accuracy by checking, and then checking again.

Language

- Use plain English language which is easy to understand
- Avoid the use of "I" except in the Career Objective section; and
- Avoid exaggerations or baseless assertions (ie. statements without evidence) particularly about how "good" you are.

Respond to Key Selection Criteria

Take advantage of the first opportunity to demonstrate you are the best candidate for Council.

Your response to the Key Selection Criteria (“KSC”) is your first opportunity to show the recruiter you are the right fit for the position and Council.

This section of your application should not be omitted nor underestimated as a key tool selection panels use to shortlist for interview. Ensure you respond to all KSC as a minimum, using a professional, report style format.

The KSC outline the qualities, knowledge and skills needed to perform the position.

They are designed to help make the most accurate match between the requirements of a position and the skills of an applicant.

No matter how well suited or qualified you are for a position, if you do not address the KSC when required, your application will not proceed through to the interview stage.

The below information presents a guide to answering KSC.

How to address the KSC

1. Read and reread the advertisement, KSC and position description
2. Print or save the position description so you can easily refer to them at a later date
3. Highlight key words and consider what the recruiter is looking for
4. List examples to evidence how you meet the KSC – describe relevant skills, experience, training, personal qualities and expertise
5. Review your list and summarise in two to three paragraphs, how you have demonstrated you meet the KSC; and
6. Ask someone with a fresh set of eyes to proofread your responses.
7. Ensure you always check spelling and grammar

‘SAO’ Approach

Follow the SAO approach when answering the KSC:

Situation: where and when you did something

Action: what you did and how you did it; and

Outcome: what was the result of your actions?

Ensure when preparing your response to the KSC you:

- Try to address the SAO in no more than two to three paragraphs (avoid writing an essay)
- Use sentences (however some dot points are okay)

- Be factual
- Do not use undefined acronyms nor jargon; and
- Show your confidence, however avoid exaggerations or baseless assertions which are unsupported.

Examples to KSC

Sample KSC 1

High level interpersonal skills with ability to communicate issues and concepts effectively with staff, the ability to liaise with a broad range of stakeholders to ascertain and manage their needs.

Sample response

“I am able to foster positive relationships with internal and external stakeholders. In the role of XYZ with the Electoral Commission, establishing strong relationships with representatives from Indigenous organisations was integral to educating Indigenous people on their right to enrol and vote at the XYZ state election. I established these relationships by meeting with key personnel and touching base with them regularly to discuss enrolment matters or matters of interest to their organisation. To develop positive relationships with internal stakeholders I adopted a similar approach but I also took the time to get to know my colleagues on a personal level by attending staff morning teas and social lunches. In addition, where I required input or assistance with a task from my colleagues, I met personally with each one of them to explain the task and what was required from their respective areas. I then confirmed our conversation in writing with an offer of assistance for completing their task.”

Sample KSC 2

Knowledge or training equivalent to one of the following: a degree with at least 4 years subsequent relevant experience; or extensive experience and management expertise in technical or administrative fields within communications; or an equivalent combination of relevant experience and/or education/training.

Sample response

“I am tertiary qualified in X and X and have over eight years’ experience working in a range of communication based roles. I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from XYZ University in 2000 and a Graduate Certificate of Marketing from XYZ University in 2005. I worked as the communications officer at the Electoral Commission for 18 months and communications adviser at the X Services Commissioner and X Services Board for four years.”

Another effective approach is to include a table outlining the selection criteria in the left hand column and describing relevant experience, education, knowledge or skills in the right hand column. An example follows:

Selection Criteria	
Knowledge or training equivalent to completion of an Undergraduate Degree or relevant work related experience	B. Science Monash University Completed 2006 (3 years)
Working With Children Check	W89838348 Valid to: 4-1-2013

Preparing for the Behavioural Interview

Behavioural interviews are based on the premise that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour, and are consequently the most common questions recruiters will ask during an interview.

You should respond to behavioural interview questions using the “STAR Method”.

The STAR Method is used for answering interview questions which provides context, highlights your skills and quantifies your experience to provide a clear example.

SITUATION

Describe the situation you were in

TASK

Outline the goal you were working toward/the task which was required of you

ACTION

Describe the actions you took to address the situation

RESULT

Describe the outcome of your actions

When preparing your response to behavioural interview questions, use the position description to identify the key selection criteria, and mould your examples to these questions.

Common selection criteria include:

- Communication Skills
- Attention to Detail
- Customer Focus
- Resilience, Teamwork
- Persuasiveness
- Initiative
- Decision Making
- Time Management

Example

Please describe a situation when you have had to consider your audience and adapt your verbal communication skills.

TASK

I was recently required to address performance concerns with an employee.

SITUATION

The employee was responsible for preparing fabrics for curtains, however there were concerns with the quality of her work and the speed she completed the task.

The employee was new to the business and had limited English language skills.

ACTION

I considered the employees ability to understand English and the significance of the meeting and determined it was appropriate to engage a translator to support our conversation. During the meeting I spoke clearly and articulately and provided the translator adequate time to translate the conversation. I also ensured the employee understood what was being translated. I provided the employee with a letter outlining the expectations of the business which was translated.

RESULT

Consequently, the employee was aware of our concerns regarding her performance, we addressed those concerns and put measures in place to support her to improve. The employee's performance improved almost immediately which was a fantastic outcome. We also invested in English lessons to support her.