

# THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST

To obtain qualified lifeguards,  
you must use an effective hiring  
process | by Leland Yarger

**R**egardless of your facility, hiring lifeguards takes time and effort from many individuals. An ineffective hiring process means increased payroll costs, greater physical risks, and potential embarrassment and liability to the organization if unqualified applicants are hired. That's the last thing anyone wants. Here, we'll examine effective hiring procedures that will help avoid missteps.

## **The process**

The selection process and the order in which it is conducted can go either way, increasing or decreasing your expenses. For example, if you conduct a background check on every lifeguard applicant prior to the selection, those who wash out have cost you money that you didn't need to spend. Careful consideration of the process should be made prior to advertising the vacant position(s). Topic areas to consider include placement of an advertisement, application submissions, skills and knowledge tests, interviews, physical exams/drug testing, background checks, and data analysis.

Of course, ultimately, each organization needs to consider the rationale for every step in the process and what kind of procedures will work best for their specific situation.

## **> Advertise the position**

Make sure all advertisements include the position, minimum required qualifications, preferred qualifications and the date on which

the ad closes. If special application procedures are required, such as “online” or “in person” — or if “proof of certification” submissions are used — include the directions in the ad. At the end, provide contact information as well as a phone number or email address in case applicants have questions.

#### > Application submissions

Once it's time to start accepting applications, the process must be overseen by an individual who's completely familiar with the requirements for the position. Only applications that fully meet the qualifications should be accepted.

Consider developing example sheets for any certifications that are required of applicants. An example sheet is easy to make because you should already have copies of certifications from the various lifeguard training agencies on file. Just make photocopies of the documents, front and back. Then your staff can use these photocopies to make comparisons with the certifications provided by job candidates.

If an application fails to meet the required qualifications, tell the candidate immediately. Explain that their application won't be accepted unless it fully complies with the requirements listed in the ad.

Each application that comes in should be marked with a time and date stamp for

tracking purposes. Once the ad close date arrives, the applications should be boxed up and sealed for the department head (aquatics director) to review. He or she can verify that each applicant meets the minimum requirements as posted in the ad. Any applications that fail the minimum requirements should be promptly returned to your human resources department.

Applicants meeting the minimum qualifications can be ranked, from most qualified to least. Evaluate the applications to determine who has the most working experience and if any preferred qualifications are held. It can be useful to have a rating scale such as “1” having the least credentials/experience to “10” having the most.

Part of the application process, especially for part-time positions, should be the submission of working hour availability. This availability could disqualify candidates if they're unwilling to work when they are needed, and that should be clearly stated on the application form.

#### > Skills and knowledge tests

The department head can prepare a letter and/or phone script to be used to notify qualified lifeguard candidates that the organization wants them to come in for testing. Tell them to be prepared to demonstrate their skills and abilities, including swimming skills, water

rescues, CPR, first aid, AED and emergency oxygen administration. The letter should clearly state the testing date, start and approximate end times, and location. Explain, too, that the applicant will be required to read, understand and sign an injury/accident waiver to participate in the testing. An example of a testing waiver:

*I understand that lifeguarding skills have an inherent risk for sustaining injury, as does any physical activity. I furthermore understand that injury or even death could result during testing, even through no fault of my own. By signing this form, I agree to hold harmless the organization, its agents and volunteers who sponsor and conduct this testing. The applicant must print and sign their name, date the document, and provide an emergency contact phone number. A witness must also print, sign and date the document upon watching the applicant complete the form.*

The organization should seek legal counsel when creating this type of form to ensure that it meets their needs.

On the day of the skills and knowledge tests, the applicant's arrival time should be noted on their assessment sheet. The sheet should have areas that explain the skill, the name of the person who is evaluating the test and how the participant is rated. This could be a simple pass/fail event, a scored event, or a combination. Following are some examples of tests that could be used.



**IN-WATER TESTS:** Lifeguard applicants should be required to demonstrate their water skills, from timed swim tests to rescuing a submerged unconscious victim.

in the water. Upon surfacing, the patron swims to the side, gets out of the pool and notices a cut on the side of their left foot." Tell the applicant: "As the lifeguard, write down what you think is happening in this situation and explain what you would do to provide care and report the incident." Rationale: It should be possible to quantify each question for objective scoring. The purpose is to determine the candidates' abilities and knowledge. Avoid subjective questions, which can create the appearance that interviewers are unfair in their assessments and selection.

### Physical exam and drug test

Applicants who are successful with the previous testing and assessment (it could be the top 10 applicants) are asked to undergo a physical exam and drug test. Make sure they understand that if they test positive for illegal drugs, they'll be disqualified. Rationale: A lifeguard must have the physical ability to do the job and not create a risk to patrons by having impaired

judgment or poor health. Can you justify a drug user providing care for children at the pool/facility? Health disqualifications might include asthma, where the physician feels that patron care may be compromised in an emergency or fainting spells where the individual becomes unresponsive. The inability to immediately provide care to a victim who needs assistance should disqualify lifeguard applicants.

### Background checks

Criminal background checks are a must, and may include state and federal checks. They also may include any state that the applicant has lived in previously. Consider this: Can you have an individual with a history of criminal activity working in a position of high responsibility (life or death) in situations with children?

### Data analysis and final decisions

Now all of the applicants who have made it this far can be ranked, using the rating

scale for each topic area and assessing any pass/fail criteria. This ranking makes clear the most qualified and the least qualified candidates. At this point, you simply select the individual in the No. 1 slot and make them a conditional job offer; if they accept, you start the hiring process. The selection of an applicant will initiate processes that may include payroll document completion, a discussion of standard operating procedures for the department and organization, and specific on-the-job training.

As a result of using the procedures outlined in this article, you can be confident that your decisions were based on a factual, documented method, with the best candidates receiving job offers. ■



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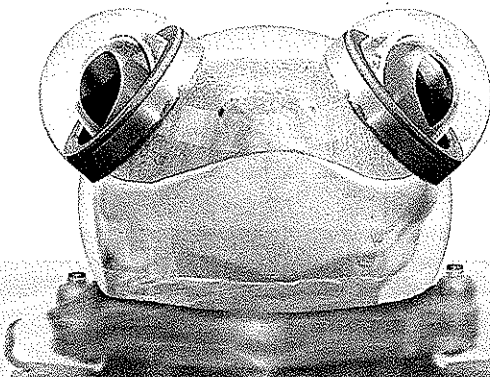
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