

## Executive Recruitment for

# NORTHWEST ILLINOIS DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

GovHR USA is pleased to announce the recruitment and selection process for an Executive Director for the Northwest Illinois Development Alliance. This brochure provides background information on the area and its organization, as well as the requirements and expected qualifications for the position. Candidates should apply by March 19, 2018 with resume, cover letter and contact information for five work-related references to [www.govhrusa.com/current-positions/recruitment](http://www.govhrusa.com/current-positions/recruitment) to the attention of Lee Szymborski, Senior Vice President, GovHR USA, 630 Dundee Road, #130, Northbrook, IL 60062. Tel: 847-380-3240. NIDA is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

### Lee Szymborski, Senior Vice President

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630 Dundee Road, Suite 130  
Northbrook, Illinois 60062  
847-380-3240

Formal Applications should  
be submitted to:

[www.govhrusa.com/current-positions/recruitment](http://www.govhrusa.com/current-positions/recruitment)



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



## ANNOUNCEMENT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORTHWEST ILLINOIS DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE (NIDA)**, (Regional pop. 50,000+). A consortium of communities and businesses in northwestern Illinois, the Northwest Illinois Development Alliance serves Stephenson County, its County Seat the City of Freeport and other member municipalities and businesses in an area 25 miles west of Rockford, and 20 miles south of the Wisconsin border. The area is easily accessible to major metropolitan areas in every direction. Site of an 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debate, known for more than 150 years as "Pretzel City" and home to several Fortune 500 companies, Freeport and its adjoining communities combine history and progress in an area offering both urban and rural living.

The Northwest Illinois Development Alliance is a public/private economic development corporation focused on retaining and expanding business, and diversifying the economic base of the City of Freeport and Stephenson County area in northwest Illinois. The Alliance is at an exciting time in its history, as it and three other organizations of similar missions are in advanced discussions about merging efforts to form what for placeholder purposes is being referred to as NewCo. In addition to NIDA, NewCo may include the Freeport Area Chamber of Commerce, the Stephenson County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Freeport Downtown Development Foundation. The Executive Director of NIDA will oversee the newly formed corporation which will be a 501 C (3) Corporation, and will manage the operations of a 501 C (6) organization focused on business advocacy at the local, state and national level.

Candidates will find all quarters of the region – private and public sector interests – aligned to assure the success of the next Director. Value-added agriculture and manufacturing comprise greater than 25% of the local economy; more retail and industrial development is desired. Workforce development and business-education



partnerships are goals for the region, as jobs are in good supply.

Candidates with initiative, creativity and a proven track-record of retaining, expanding and recruiting businesses are encouraged to apply. The ideal candidate is a people-person adept at building relationships, and will have:

- High energy, enthusiasm and passion;
- Strong communication and strategic planning skills;
- The ability to direct a multi-disciplinary staff in the areas of planning and development, tourism, membership and business development;
- Fund-raising skills and the ability to broaden the organization's investor base;
- A demonstrated ability to work collaboratively with a wide variety of stakeholders including government officials and staff, brokers, developers, and local business owners;
- A Bachelor's degree in business, marketing, communications, planning, real estate, public administration or related disciplines; a Master's degree is a plus;
- Five years of progressively responsible experience in economic development, redevelopment, marketing or real estate in either the public or private sector, or association work in the related fields, is preferred; and
- Knowledge about the operations of a 501 C (3)/501 C (6) organization.

The position will report to an independent Board of Directors with representatives from the private and public sector. Salary is \$130,000 +/- DOQ, and competitive benefits. Residency in Stephenson County is encouraged, and a high degree of visibility is expected.

E-mail cover letter, resume and five professional references no later than March 19, 2018 to: Lee Szyborski, Senior Vice President, GovHR USA, 630 Dundee Road, Suite 130, Northbrook IL 60062 at [www.govhrusa.com/current-positions/recruitment](http://www.govhrusa.com/current-positions/recruitment). Phone [847.380.3243](tel:847.380.3243).

## STEPHENSON COUNTY AREA HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The area NIDA serves covers Stephenson County, Illinois, located 20 minutes west of Rockford, and two hours from Chicago. The county seat is the City of Freeport, the largest of the county's municipalities. NIDA represents 10 other municipalities in Stephenson County including Cedarville, Dakota, Davis, German Valley, Lena, Orangeville, Pearl City, Ridott, Rock City and Winslow.

Stephenson County takes its name from Colonel Benjamin Stephenson, who served as a colonel in the War of 1812 in the Illinois Militia. In 1813 he was appointed adjutant general of the territory. In 1814 Stephenson was elected delegate to Congress, where he served until 1816.

In 1827, German settlers from Pennsylvania began arriving in the Freeport area to make their homes. Among them was William "Tutty" Baker, credited as the founder of Freeport, who built a trading post on the banks of the Pecatonica River. Originally called Winneshiek, the community took its name from the fact of Baker's renowned generosity - "Free Port" - when it incorporated.

In 1837, Stephenson County was incorporated and in 1838, Freeport became its seat of government. Linked by stagecoach with Chicago, the community grew rapidly.

On August 27, 1858, the most significant of the historic Lincoln-Douglas debates took place in Freeport and gave the nation direction in succeeding years. Although Douglas won the election and retained his Senate seat, his reply to a question on slavery alienated the South, which called it the "Freeport Heresy," and split the Democratic Party.

Today, a highly diverse collection of business and industry is well established in Stephenson County's municipalities. From insurance to manufacturing to health care, the area is a center for a variety of quality establishments. Stephenson County's location— in the middle of a rural America yet within easy driving distance to several of the Midwest's big cities – Chicago, Milwaukee and Madison – provides businesses and residents with many choices to enhance their professional and personal lives.

As an industrial center, the area is home to several Fortune 500 companies. Honeywell's Sensing and Control division has several plants, and makes a wide range of switches, sensors, and related interface and local control components. Titan Tire is in the rural area southeast of Freeport, and is known worldwide for its

automobile, truck, and farm tractor tires. Newell Brands, a global leader in consumer-goods products, has a significant presence in the area, including a major reinvestment in the central city.

Adding to a hearty list of manufacturers is Danfoss Power Solutions, a manufacturer of hydraulic and electronic components; Tri Star Metals, which operates a mill in Freeport and produces stainless steel and nickel alloy bars; and Anchor-Harvey, a forgings supplier and manufacturer of aluminum components.

Another of the area's major employers is Furst-McNess Company, which was founded in 1908. Furst-McNess makes and distributes feed premix for farm animals, plus a large variety of household products, flavoring, desserts, mustards, and spices. Star Manufacturing Company produces hot formed, hot forged and heat treated parts, and specializes in various grades and sizes of steels.

In the insurance industry, the area is represented by MetLife and Sentry Insurance. Other significant employers are the School Districts serving the greater Freeport area, the City of Freeport, Stephenson County, and FHN, the regional healthcare system based in Freeport.

A wide range of products originates in the area. They include potato chips, rebuilt engines, ready-mix concrete, cultured marble, trophies, cheese, municipal water treatment systems, packaging, roll forming and sheet metal working machinery, molded plastics, automation equipment, vending machines, and snack foods.



There are 21,899 households in Stephenson County. The County's population is approximately 86% white, 9% African-American, 3% Hispanic, with other races and ethnicities making up the balance. The median household income is \$45,624, and the median family

## Northwest Illinois Development Alliance

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income is \$56,673; the median home value of \$98,700 is based on 2016 U.S. Census data. The Rockford-Freeport-Rochelle Combined Statistical Area has a population of more than 430,000. Unemployment in Freeport, at 5.0 % (Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2018), is slightly above the national average of 4.1%. Unemployment in the County is 4.2%.

The County encompasses 568 square miles, of which there are more than 15 parks and preserves, including several miles of recreational trails. Comprehensive recreational facilities are provided by the [Freeport Park District](#). Other park districts include the Lena Community Park District, Pearl City Park District and the Winslow Township Park District.

The Freeport Park District maintains more the 800 acres of active and passive-use parks, a golf course – Park Hills Golf Club offers two 18-hole courses to over 300 acres – and the Oakdale Nature Preserve which offers 133 acres of forests, restored prairies, and more than four miles of trails. The District also offers an antique carousel, 18-hole miniature golf course, boat rental operation, historical museum, skate park, and two tournament quality ball field complexes, and a robust list of recreational programs.

Community residents have a choice of both public and private elementary and high schools. The County is covered by 11 school districts. The largest, [Freeport School District 145](#), offers a comprehensive educational program for students in the kindergarten through the twelfth grades.

Located in Freeport is [Highland Community College's](#) 140-acre campus. The two-year college serves a district population of 90,000 over a four-county area. The college enrolls approximately 7,500 students annually, and offers degrees in 28 majors and certificates in 21 different career programs. Highland students may also complete a four-year degree through Columbia College, which is also located on the campus.

Nearby noteworthy institutions include Northern Illinois University (NIU), located in DeKalb. NIU is the second-largest university in the State of Illinois system, with 25,000 students; Rock Valley College, Rockford Career College and Rockford University, all of which are located in Rockford and offer a mix of Industry Certificates, Associate, BA and Advanced degrees. Other institutions of higher learning are found in Madison, Milwaukee and Chicago.

Award-winning healthcare is easily found in the county. FHN is the regional healthcare system serving northwest

Illinois and southern Wisconsin. FHN offers a wide range of services including a cancer center, a complete cardiac care center and a range of choices for family healthcare with 29 primary healthcare providers. FHN offers affiliations with all three major hospitals in Rockford as well as with the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics in Madison. The Monroe Clinic also serves the area. Monroe Clinic offers advanced medical equipment and technology, including da Vinci<sup>®</sup> surgery and digital mammography, combined with personalized care. Physicians and staff are committed to providing exceptional healthcare, education and peace of mind. With five convenient clinic locations in Illinois, Monroe Clinic is dedicated to helping you get better faster and stay healthier longer.



Art, history and theater interests can be fulfilled in the County. The Freeport Arts Museum contains historical and contemporary art housed in a converted brick school built in 1911. The Silver Creek Museum provides Americana and antique machinery displays. The Winneshiek Players provide quality, live theater each season and is the oldest continuous amateur theater in the country. The Ferguson Fine Arts Theater, located on the campus of Highland Community College, features a variety of vocal and music concerts, live theater, and special performances.

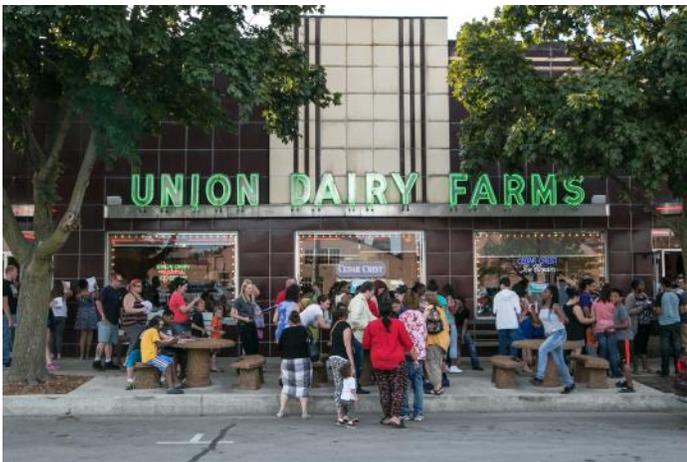
Community events are plentiful in the area, providing an array of activities throughout the year. A full menu can be found at the Freeport/Stephenson County Convention & Visitors Bureau Website at [www.stephenson-county-il.org](http://www.stephenson-county-il.org)

Visitors and residents alike can experience the history of the second of the famous debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas at Freeport's downtown Lincoln-Douglas Debate Square. At the site on August 27, 1858 was when the Freeport Doctrine, an important

statement regarding slavery and state's rights, was proclaimed by Douglas. Although Douglas won the Senatorial campaign for which the debate was held, his statements lost him the support of the South and split the Democratic Party. This enabled Lincoln to win the Presidency in 1860, thus precipitating the Civil War. The site is self-interpretative including a monument to the debate dedicated in 1903 by President Theodore Roosevelt as well as a life-size statute recreating the event.

The Freeport Public Library's history dates to 1889. It became one of the first Carnegie libraries in Illinois when in 1902 the Carnegie Library opened on Stephenson Street. In 2003, a new facility opened, and the old Carnegie building is now Freeport's new City Hall, renovated in 2017.

Stretching north to the Wisconsin state line, the Jane Addams Trail is a multi-use recreational trail of beautiful scenery. The 17-mile trail is highlighted by 22 bridges, including the historic Van Buren Bridge erected in 1885 and a covered bridge outside Orangeville, and traverses northern Illinois through wetlands, creeks, woods, and prairies. (Source: Freeport/Stephenson County Convention & Visitors Bureau)



## ABOUT NIDA, ITS MISSION AND EVOLUTION

NIDA is a not-for-profit economic development corporation focused on retaining and expanding business, and diversifying the economic base of the City of Freeport, Stephenson County, and northwest Illinois.

NIDA focuses on supporting business development, creating and retaining primary jobs, and aligning the skills

of the area's workforce with the needs of business. It does so by employing the land, capital, infrastructure and labor resources of the community, in sync with the market and within a business-friendly environment.

NIDA's public/private structure maximizes the effectiveness of regional economic development efforts while minimizing the cost. The organization:

- Utilizes its staff so local governments avoid the added cost of hiring their own staffs and duplicating efforts;
- Facilitates inter-governmental and private sector collaboration needed to maximize economic development results; and
- Provides developers as well as prospective and existing businesses a one-stop shop for information and assistance.

In the last quarter of 2017, a number of community stakeholders initiated a conversation that contemplated the restructuring of the area's economic development efforts, a consideration further advanced by NIDA's current Executive Director announcing his intention to retire in mid-2018. The idea was advanced by a look at how some other communities have modeled a consolidated approach to economic development. Some of the organizations researched included Berwyn Development Corporation (Berwyn, IL), Forward Janesville (Janesville, WI), and the Tulsa Regional Chamber (Tulsa, OK).

Consequently, a task force was assembled to study the idea of merging NIDA with the Freeport Area Chamber of Commerce, the Stephenson County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Freeport Downtown Development Foundation. Members of all four organizations are represented on the task force. Together, these organizations have more than 600 members.

The task force's work has advanced that as of February 2018 all four organizations have gone on record expressing a preliminary interest in merging. Final direction on the plan is expected in March 2018.

The framework around the newly formed organization has the present-day NIDA Executive Director position overseeing the newly formed corporation, which will include a 501 C (3) organization as well as a 501 C (6), Chamber of Commerce organization. The new organization – for “placeholder” purposes referred to as “NewCo” – will have a Board of Directors, consisting of public and private sector representatives. The Chamber of Commerce arm of NewCo will also have a Board of Directors consisting of the NewCo Board members without the public-sector entities' representatives.

The Executive Director of NewCo will direct and oversee a comprehensive interdisciplinary economic development program for Freeport and Stephenson County that includes business retention and recruitment, workforce development, community marketing, tourism and small business services with a single vision and execution plan focused on growing a sustainable economy.



Specific areas of responsibility for the Executive Director include:

- Promoting growth and development by working with all public and private strategic partners;
- Identifying and directing public/ private joint ventures that are consistent with NewCo's economic development objectives;
- Promoting workforce development, attraction and retention, and regional business roundtables;
- Fundraising;
- Managing and operating a 501 C (3) and (6) organization;
- Supporting the Board of Directors; and
- Being the agency's primary spokesperson.

Reporting to the Executive Director will be:

- Planning and Development Director - The Planning and Development Director will develop land use plans and programs that help the community and region accommodate business and population growth and revitalize physical facilities in Freeport and Stephenson County.
- Member Services Director - The Member Services Director will be responsible for meeting community development, membership services, small business development and special program goals and objectives.
- Tourism and Marketing Director - The Tourism and Marketing Director will be the management

leader of the Freeport/Stephenson County Convention and Visitors Bureau. The Director is responsible for overseeing the administration, programs, and marketing plan for increasing tourism and stimulating economic development in Freeport and Stephenson County.

- Two Administrative Assistants.
- Chamber of Commerce Business Advocacy Committee.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The successful candidate will find a welcoming community and enjoy strong support for the position, the newly formed organization and its mission. All community stakeholders have a sincere desire for the Executive Director to succeed. Support comes from a broad range of community stakeholders – elected officials, business owners and residents. In light of a new, combined organization, the new Director will face challenges and opportunities on two fronts – internal and external issues.

Internally, the new Director is expected to confidently, skillfully and quickly establish the position's leadership role within the organization by listening, assessing and marshaling NewCo's management team, workforce and resources.

In this regard, the successful candidate can expect to:

- Assure that NewCo's new governance structure transitions smoothly and purposefully, working closely with the Board of Directors to understand, articulate and move forward the agency's vision;
- Work quickly to fill positions with professionals possessing enthusiasm and energy to meet head-on the economic development, marketing, tourism and small business advocacy mission and challenges of the region and newly formed organization;
- Lead the agency in developing a new strategic plan;
- Assess the financial footing of the organization, and identify opportunities for collaboration, fundraising, and membership growth.

Externally, the new Executive Director can expect to undertake an intense understanding of the area's strengths and obstacles in order to identify opportunities for economic growth and workforce development. He/she is encouraged to reach out to all corners of the community eager to share their ideas and hopes for the region they deeply love. Some of the external conditions the new Director will find are described below.

- In the last couple decades, the area has been challenged by a shrinking tax base, a loss of jobs, and a declining population. Civic organizations and businesses, however, have coalesced to make considerable inroads in a number of key areas. For instance, the area's housing stock is one of the most affordable in the state, the unemployment rate has declined, crime has decreased and heightened development interests are creating an exciting re-interest in the central city and other parts of the county.
  - A successful referendum approved by Freeport voters in 2016 changed the City's governance structure. After years under a Mayor-Council form of government, voters approved a Council-Manager structure, ostensibly to instill a more business-like approach to the City's management and operations.
  - Efforts to rebuild the local tax base include the [City Centre Freeport](#) (CCF) initiative, a collaborative group of downtown business and building owners, entrepreneurs, and Freeport enthusiasts seeking to transform downtown Freeport into a residential, commercial, shopping, and entertainment destination. The City Centre Freeport Plan was developed in the fall of 2015 and earned support from NIDA, the Freeport Area Chamber of Commerce, the Freeport/Stephenson County Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Freeport Downtown Development Foundation. The Plan was unanimously adopted by the Freeport City Council in 2016.
  - In addition to the work undertaken by the City Centre Freeport (CCF) initiative, and in concert with stakeholders from different quarters of the community, are complementary economic development programs that are ambitious, with the goals of attracting new business and families to Freeport. A sampling of other efforts include Collaborate Freeport, a group of business and government leaders, community development organizations, and citizens that are coming together to brand and market Freeport and Stephenson County to create a stronger sense of community, increase economic development and work toward a shared vision of a vibrant, healthy and engaged Stephenson County. *Freeport All In* is the new community brand for Freeport and Stephenson County. The branding effort's goal is to share Freeport's story inside and outside the community to improve economic development, enhance tourism and build community.
- Available space for industrial development in the area is generally considered is at its limit. Consequently, expanding or attracting development in this sector will largely depend on working with the farming community.
  - Community leaders agree that there are plentiful jobs in the region, mostly entry to mid-level skilled jobs. However, a gap exists between employers' availability and needs versus job-seekers' training. Also contributing to this gap – a phenomenon not uncommon throughout the country – is a lesser emphasis on preparing high school students for the trades and technical jobs.



- Other economic development concerns relate to the segment of US Highway 20 from Freeport to Dubuque, Iowa. This segment of Hwy 20 is the last remaining one in the country with a two-lane design, and the absence of four-lane facility has arguably been an impediment to attracting new businesses to the region, as cross-country movement of goods has chosen Interstates 90, 88 and 80 as preferred routes west of Chicago. The expansion of this segment has been studied on multiple occasions, with environmental, social and economic impacts examined. To date, however, only small portions of a four-lane facility have been funded.
- Like many older Midwestern cities, Stephenson county communities have a long list of demands on its aging infrastructure. Civic leaders greatly appreciate the link between strong utilities and streets with economic vitality, however, the list of capital demands is ever-growing. For instance, in Freeport city staff looked at the long-term infrastructure needs for the city, identifying a potential \$72 million in street and bridge project needs over the next 50 years, and \$165

million in utility reinvestment and deferred maintenance projects needing attention over the next several decades. Coupled with financial limitations in communities sensitive to their tax burdens, civic leaders have a long list of significant infrastructure needs.

- Retail sales gaps have been identified, and certain pockets of distressed real estate have added strain to the tax base. And while the collection of sales tax receipts are an opportunity for growth, community leaders are very cognizant of economic conditions that affect the tax base such as blighted properties, vacant land and undervalued properties that add downward pressure.

## CANDIDATE QUALIFICATION CRITERIA

The Executive Director is expected to be visible in the community, requiring well-developed leadership abilities and management skills that are based upon consensus building and problem-solving. The Executive Director must have a strong desire to work in a collegial, team-oriented environment. He/she must be a highly motivated, self-starting and confident individual with excellent interpersonal skills.

### Education and Experience

- A Bachelor's degree in business, marketing, communications, planning, real estate, public administration or related disciplines; a Master's degree is a plus.
- Five years of progressively responsible experience in economic development, redevelopment, marketing or real estate in either the public or private sector, or association work in the related fields, is preferred.
- Knowledge about the operations of a 501 C (3)/501 C (6) organization.
- The Director should be well-versed at how to rally business and government resources in order to retain businesses and build tax-base. As well, the new Director can expect to work with the government, business and other stakeholder interests to address some financial conditions that appear to collide, such as a strong, diverse employment base that stands in contrast to a property tax base that's been in decline, although more recently stabilized.
- Have a broad-based knowledge of economic development concepts and practices as well as a record of continuing education and training to keep current on the economic development field.
- Have a record of experience that demonstrates the ability to see the "big picture" as well as to conceive and develop innovative long- and short-range strategies for addressing economic development challenges.
- Have a familiarity with the principles and current techniques in land use, zoning, annexation, special use permit processes, and building and inspectional services, so as to understand the complementary relationship between municipal and business interests' economic development goals.
- Have experience or strong exposure to modern land use trends, as well as economic incentives for attracting and retaining businesses. Have the analytical skills to evaluate incentive programs requested by the business community.
- Have the experience and ability to interact successfully and positively in a participatory environment, working openly and effectively with diverse interests and opinions represented by business groups, elected officials, citizen groups, and intergovernmental interests.
- Have a demonstrable experience in collaborative leadership, effectively forming partnerships and communicating a clear strategy for the Association's economic development, marketing and tourism functions.
- Have enthusiasm for interaction a variety of stakeholder groups important to promoting the region's business development strategy; this includes regular attendance at meetings of economic/business development professionals, service organizations, and other gatherings – social as well as business.
- Appreciate the importance of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and other electronic marketing platforms that proactively communicate the NIDA's economic development and tourism message.
- Have the ability to work with a wide spectrum of business owners or representatives, including those from national corporations to owner-operator businesses.

- Have knowledge of and experience in financial management, including real estate and banking practices, and the ability to evaluate the fiscal impact of economic development projects and programs.
- Be able to read, compose, analyze and comprehend documents pertaining to business development projects including master plans, construction site plans, budget documents, technical reports, strategic plans and government regulations.
- Possess the ability to speak before groups and interact positively with the media. Have the experience and ability to maintain effective public relations and news media relationships.
- Be a clear and concise communicator. Possess strong listening abilities and a genuine desire to engage a variety of stakeholders in problem-solving.
- Be able to present complex technical information to any audience in a manner that is understandable and jargon-free.
- Be creative in solving problems.
- Have a high energy level and enthusiasm for meeting the challenges and responsibilities of the Director's position; have a strong work ethic.
- Possess well developed organizational skills with the ability to balance numerous projects and issues.

### Working with a Governing Board

- Have a demonstrated record of effectively working with a governing board of directors, such as for a non-profit organization or a municipality, practicing a no surprises approach in communicating with the board.
- When making recommendations to the board, be one who is strong in his/her convictions, but also be collaborative and flexible in instances when the board does not accept a recommendation and seeks a different solution.
- Keep the board apprised of issues of concern to the membership, including those that may not rise to the level of board discussion.
- Be able to discern the difference between consensus building and unanimity and also know when to assist in the facilitation of the board's discussion.
- Be nimble enough to adapt to changing board members. Be comfortable, patient and encouraging with a diverse composition of board members representing an array of business and civic interests.
- Project a professional presence in appearance, actions, and personal demeanor.
- Be proactive, anticipatory and innovative; be someone who can make difficult decisions and stand behind those decisions.
- Be willing to keep the Board and others apprised of major activities and operations of the Association in a consistent and timely manner, passing on both "good news and bad news" in a tactful, self-confident and professional manner.
- Be an empathetic leader, able to understand the stresses and demands on the Association's membership, be they a business or civic organization. Consequently, be well-read and up-to-date on economic trends and other conditions affecting both the public and private sector.

### Management Style and Personal Traits

- Have complete personal and professional integrity, gaining respect and inspiring the trust and confidence of subordinates, co-workers, and elected and appointed officials, as well as the general public.

