



Hiring: the most important thing a Manager does

Some lessons on hiring and managing, I've learned again-and-again. On and off for nearly 40 years, I've been paid to hire, fire and manage people. I've worked for different organizations, supervisors, and company cultures. I learned from every situation. A few hires, I regret; usually, those hired out of my own impatience allowing a perfunctory process to meet an immediate need. Then you are stuck with that compromise for years.

- While facilitating hiring processes for three consecutive weeks at the start of the year—each with different hiring teams—I found myself articulating operating principles that have consistently served me well: Every opening is an opportunity to improve the organization.



- Hiring the right talent is THE most important thing a manager does.
- Look for qualities that cannot be trained. Motivation. Enthusiasm. Smart, intuitive, self-activated people usually outperform those with more experience without those qualities. A corollary to this is that only so much can be learned from a resume.
- Good interviews turn into discussions that have a flow. Interviews are not one-directional inquiries. This is usually on the lead interviewer.
- Strong candidates interview the interviewers because quality employers recognize that “fit” goes both ways.
- Especially in the public sector, patience is imperative. Hiring under duress usually results in a filled position, not a legacy employee. This is one of the major mistakes that Boards make when hiring an Executive. If there isn't a strong candidate in the pool, regroup and start over.
- Related to all the above, my bumper sticker could read: I Wait for Talent.

We posted key jobs in December 2025 and January 2026. Doing the work you usually delegate to other positions can be enlightening. To back up a few steps, we've made many changes since this time last year.

In 2024 and 2025, the number of hires that NWCCOG made broke our process. Without a dedicated HR person, too many responsibilities fell on our Office Manager or a single person in Energy where many hires occurred. Oh, we had checklists and forms. Lots of forms. Instructional videos. More checklists. Our platform was so complicated that entry level hires found using paper to be simpler. By the end of 2025, we had overhauled the process and changed platforms. Here is how that happened.

This time last year we brought in Brian Elms with Change Agents for a series of virtual engagements. Five of us were tasked with onboarding, explaining what we did, and mapping out what we did. There were a lot of steps. Brian had each of us call in to his AI bot, COCO, to be interviewed. COCO created process maps and cross-checked each of our inputs. The result made us cringe. What we put new hires through was excruciating. Elms challenged us to distill onboarding to a half-day, to identify what was crucial and ditch the rest. We took our spreadsheet and dispersed content to pre-first day, first day, first week, first six months, and policies & procedures that should be refreshed with all employees annually. We made some immediate alterations to the process. What became clear was that our current platform for onboarding and performance management was incapable of what we envisioned. Then, the entire process was put on hold. We went in search of an integrated HRM platform- a massive investigative effort led by Becky Walter, our Finance Director. There are quite a few HRM platforms. Understanding each took multiple sales calls, spreadsheets, analysis, experimentation. Six months later, we fired our onboarding and performance management software and transitioned to Paycom. This also took considerable time and focus. Thank you, Becky. By October 2025, our first payroll ran successfully through the system. In November 2025, our first on-boardings went through swimmingly. By December 2025, all 57 of our annual reviews were conducted through Paycom. Employees were impressed with each step. This is not an advertisement, so I'll spare the fanfare. We were not done.

In the Fall, the Executive Committee saw a blind spot of mine. On paper we could not afford a dedicated HR employee. In practice we could not move forward at the level we needed to operate without one. More than 10 new positions were projected for 2026. It was time to hire a Human Resources professional.

My primary focus since the beginning of 2026 has been to draft a job description for that position, rewrite a less-sprawling, coherent job scope for the Office Manager; and post, interview and hire a new Admin Assistant to run the office. Then, do the same for the HR position. Then, steer a different committee through the interview process for a new position in the Northwest Loan Fund. This last process carried even more freight since the Director was seeking a possible successor and the process included loan committee members outside the organization, including one doing the two full days of interviews via video conference. Spearheading the entire hiring process for those positions, from concept to offer letter was, as I have said, the most important thing I will do in 2026. Here are some things I learned about the hiring landscape today:

1. **There is a LOT of talent around the region.** We had no trouble finding a strong slate of interviewees for all three positions, making each decision difficult.
2. **Preserve relationships.** Some candidates we didn't hire we wished we could create a position for, so I continued my practice of personally placing a call to each interviewee for condolence. Despite the wealth of talent, there is a feeling that for those of us remaining here in the high country, the fishbowl seems to shrink each year.
3. **Job search engines require close attention.** Hundreds of applicants apparently have no real interest in the posted job. Some apply from thousands of miles away. Resumes don't align with the posting. Cover letters fail to explain obvious deficiencies, and are often written without any flair, and include formatting or spelling errors, and unedited references to other jobs. It is bewildering. Who are these people?
4. **Look for people who you can learn from.** People like me need to seek candidates fluent in a galaxy of emergent technology if we want our organizations to evolve and stay relevant. Candidates use Google Assistant to screen calls- somewhat annoying, but I get it. Some organize themselves with tools like Trello or other workflow automation tools, while others don't know how to use basic functions in Outlook. While it seems a little taboo today, it is informative to ask candidates how they organize themselves, if they are using AI, and how they use it.
5. **Competitive wages are important,** but other factors like "fit," or a position with intriguing challenges, workplace norms, a lot of "soft" factors are the real deal breakers. I was surprised how many people referenced how the job description sold them. That was especially gratifying. On "fit," specifically...
6. **Culture matters.** In each case, the opportunity for flexible work schedules, remote work, and a culture of get-your-work-done, then play or take care of individual or family needs (no, I refuse to hyphenate that entire sentence) proved essential for top candidates. Being a dispersed workplace gives us options that may not be possible for some.

I am grateful to have been able to play a part in upping our game at NWCCOG to start 2026. Trent Hillier, our new Admin Assistant is already innovating and making the role his own after just a couple weeks on the job. We are eager for Becky Baugh's first day, March 2nd as our first HR Generalist. We have a lot of the pieces, but as Brian Elms taught us, a bunch of pieces does not a process make.

Lastly, at this point, Anita Cameron is spending a full day with each of the finalists for the Deputy Director position in the NLF program, a practice I've sometimes recommended for unique situations. By March 2026, one of the two amazing finalists will be starting. I look forward to learning from all three of our new hires.

[Jon Stavney](#)
Executive Director, NWCCOG

Welcome Trent Hiller to NWCCOG!



NWCCOG is pleased to welcome Trent Hillier, who joined the organization in February 2026 as the new Administrative Assistant. A proud resident of Leadville, Trent brings both professional expertise and a deep appreciation for the Colorado mountain lifestyle to his role.

Trent holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and comes to NWCCOG with several years of experience in the ski industry, where he worked in security and risk management at Copper Mountain. His background reflects a strong commitment to safety, organization, and thoughtful operations—skills that align well with NWCCOG's regional work.

Like many who choose to call Colorado home, Trent is drawn to the outdoors. An avid climber, he takes every opportunity to get out on rock or ice when the weather allows. Outside of climbing, you can find him chasing his wife on skis, trail running, or mountain biking across the high country. When he's not outside, Trent enjoys slowing down and watching the world go by with his wife and their Staffordshire Terrier mix, Jasper.

Trent is passionate about continually deepening his professional knowledge and keeping things organized, and we're excited to have his energy and experience on the NWCCOG team. Please join us in welcoming him!

CAST and NWCCOG Community Leaders Survey 2026

The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG), in partnership with the Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST), is launching this initiative to better understand how municipal and county leaders are navigating today's unprecedented pace of change.

This effort is funded through an administrative grant from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) and member dues from both organizations.

You can access the survey here:
<https://www.CommunityLeadersSurvey.org>

Please forward this link to your peer community leaders. We would love to hear from elected and appointed officials, volunteer board and commission members, business and nonprofit leaders, and local government staff.

By sharing this survey, you can help ensure that the survey reflects a broad and diverse cross-section of voices from across your community.



NWCCOG Energy Program Named 2025 Partner of the Year

On January 22, the Western Resilience Center honored 12 local leaders and organizations at its annual Environmental Leadership Awards Ceremony held at Bud Werner Memorial Library. The awards celebrate individuals and partners making a lasting impact through climate action, collaboration, and community leadership across Northwest Colorado.

We are proud to share that the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) was named 2025 Partner of the Year.

NWCCOG received the Partner of the Year award for providing vital energy efficiency services to deserving households across Northwest Colorado. Through NWCCOG's Energy Program, the organization delivers high-quality energy assessments and efficiency upgrades across a 13-county region—helping families reduce energy costs, improve home comfort, and strengthen long-term resilience.

In 2025, when the Western Resilience Center did not have the capacity to conduct home energy assessments in the Yampa Valley, NWCCOG stepped in to ensure this critical service continued locally. NWCCOG's team completed ten in-home energy assessments in the Valley, three of which led to households qualifying for the ReEnergize program. As a result, those residents received significant home



electrification and energy efficiency upgrades at no cost—delivering tangible benefits to families who needed them most.

In 2025, NWCCOG was also among the first recipients of funding from the Climate Action Plan (CAP) Collaborative Fund. These funds helped jumpstart the ReEnergize program in Routt County, expanding access to energy upgrades and reinforcing regional climate goals.

NWCCOG's willingness to collaborate, share expertise, and respond quickly to community needs exemplifies true partnership. We are honored to work alongside dedicated regional partners committed to building a more resilient Northwest Colorado.

Watch the award video here:
<https://youtu.be/Rz7GWOTxgGc>

Vintage Area Agency on Aging seeks Proposals for Services

Vintage Area Agency on Aging (AAA), is seeking proposals from qualified organizations interested in contracting to provide specific services to older adults (age 60+) and caregivers.

Older Americans Act (OAA) & State Funds for Older Adult Services will be awarded to organizations that provide the following services within the Vintage service region of Eagle, Grand, Jackson, Pitkin, Summit and Routt counties for programs from July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2028. Service specifications and proposal guide may be obtained via email (efisher@nwccog.org) or a hard copy at 249 Warren Avenue, Silverthorne, CO 80498.



Access the full RFP [here](#).

Upcoming Board Meetings

Thursday, March 19, 2026 – Silverthorne Conference Room, NWCCOG Offices, 9:00 a.m.-12 p.m.
[Council Packet available soon](#)

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