

Hiring a Market Manager

Once the organizing committee has chosen the organizational structure and created the board of directors, it is the responsibility of the board to hire a manager for the market. This section offers some guidance about the responsibilities of a market manager, the qualities to look for in a manager, and how to proceed in hiring one.

This chapter will enable members of the board of directors to:

- ▶ Hire a market manager.
- ▶ Create new working committees.

Hiring a Market Manager

The role of the market manager varies from market to market based on the community in which the market is located, the type of market, the role the board plays, and the particular manager's personality, skills, and interests. As the market development process evolves, the type of manager that fits the specific market will begin to form in the minds of board

members. Some managers hold full-time paid positions; some are vendors who annually rotate the volunteer responsibility of manager.

Randii MacNear, manager of the Davis Farmers Market in Davis, California, believes it is important that market organizers hire a manager as early in the planning process as possible. This enables the manager to develop a better understanding of what goes into creating the market and get a clear picture of the market's goals. The manager then will be more likely to be invested in making the market a success. Moreover, the experience that a manager brings to the organizational process is quite valuable and can help the board avoid many first-time market difficulties. If the board of directors can create a paid manager position, the market will have a committed worker with time allocated specifically to market management as opposed to trying to fit those responsibilities into what is likely already a busy schedule.

Manager Responsibilities

Managers have equated their jobs with parenting. While trying to nurture, support, and promote their "child's" life, they simultaneously must help it conform to external codes of conduct and to communicate values of sharing, patience, and teamwork. The following outline describes typical duties for a manager. Note,

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however, that the job varies somewhat from market to market and from manager to manager.

Market Start-up Duties

- ▣ Recruit new vendors.
- ▣ Monitor compliance with relevant regulations and codes.
- ▣ Secure necessary permits and licenses.
- ▣ Track food, store, and wholesale prices to guide pricing for the market and vendors.
- ▣ Keep farmers updated regarding competition.
- ▣ Make stall assignments.
- ▣ Review the budget and maintain records of market expenses and income.
- ▣ Make sure all vendor forms are completed properly and retained.

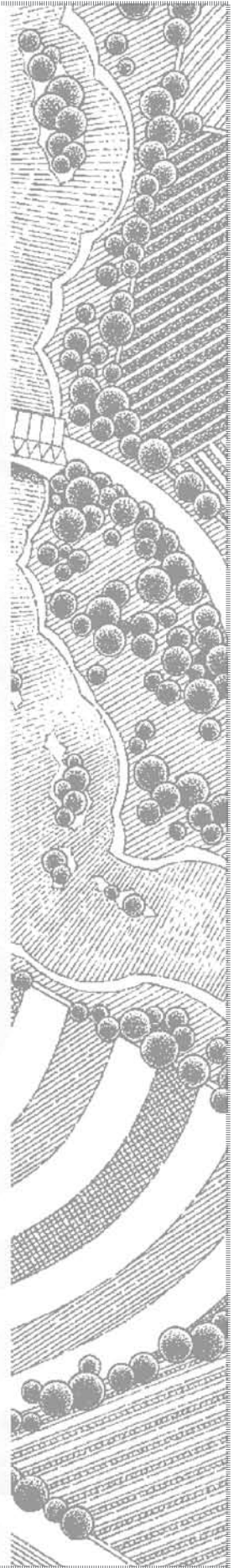


Daily Tasks and Responsibilities

- ▣ Coordinate opening and closing of the market.
- ▣ Assist at stalls when necessary.
- ▣ Enforce the bylaws.
- ▣ Handle emergencies and complaints.
- ▣ Serve as the quality control person for produce and craft items, as well as for the market's general appearance and cleanliness.
- ▣ Collect food stamps and WIC coupons from vendors.
- ▣ Maintain an information booth, guest book, recipe postings, etc.
- ▣ Keep a daily market log.
- ▣ Hold vendor meetings as necessary.

Communication and Networking Tasks

- ▣ Represent the market in meetings with community members and growers.
- ▣ Develop a positive relationship with vendors.
- ▣ Educate and assist vendors with merchandising, pricing, and other marketing and business skills.



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- Coordinate and encourage volunteerism from sponsors and community groups.
 - Build positive customer relations.
 - Maintain communications with city and county officials, the health department, the site owner, and others connected with the market.
 - Follow instructions from and maintain communications with the board of directors.
 - Work with the board and vendors to develop strategic plans.

Promotion and Advertising Duties

- Create an annual calendar of events.
- Develop new promotional ideas.
- Arrange for media coverage and represent the market to the media.
- Establish an advertising budget.
- Review logos and other marketing tools with a committee as necessary.

Evaluation Duties

- Conduct periodic surveys to assess customer opinions and satisfaction.
- Invite, listen to, and use input from vendors and others to improve the market.
- Lead in monitoring and, when necessary, revision of the market's mission, goals, and strategies.
- Evaluate and improve the effectiveness of meetings and other team activities.
- Debrief participants after board meetings, workshops, and retreats.

Qualities of a Good Manager

The market manager is crucial to the market's success. As evidenced by the responsibilities just described, market managers must be leaders who possess a complex blend of skills that are both interpersonal and organizational. Following are some qualities to consider in a potential manager.

Interest and skills in sustainable/local agriculture. The manager does not need to know everything about local crops or food production practices,

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but he or she must learn how to rate produce quality and know when certain foods are local and when they mature and become available. He or she also must be interested in understanding the concerns, lifestyles, and needs of growers.

Communication skills. The manager will need to be in communication with many different types of people—growers, regulatory authorities, the media, and the community. He or she must be able to relate well with others, feel comfortable addressing groups, and write well.

Leadership. The manager should be decisive but not domineering. He or she must be able to ask for input from many sources and coordinate feedback to make the best decision for the market. Ideally, managers should be secure, mature individuals who can accept feedback and grow from it. They should also be able to remain fair when in managing conflicts among vendors and between vendors and customers.

Community connections. A manager who is already connected to the community will know how the community functions and have a sense of where to go for support and resources. Since many of the vendors may come from outside of the area, it is helpful to have a manager who is an insider.

Organizing skills. The manager must keep many records, comply with regulations, and keep track of people.

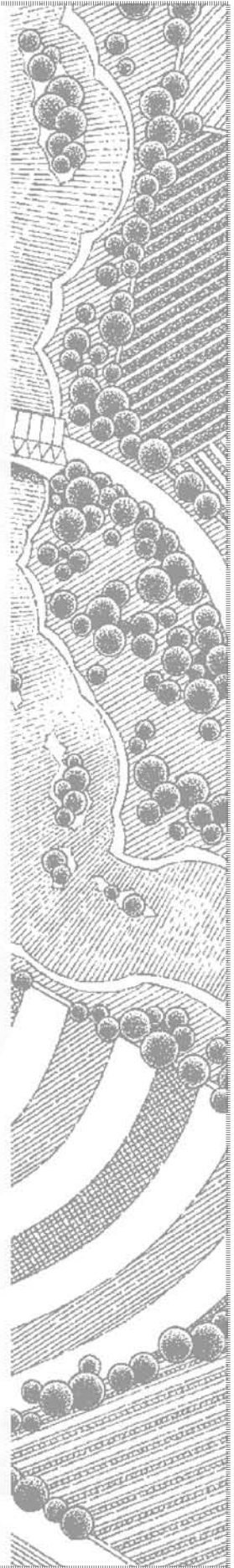
Creativity. The manager largely creates the market's atmosphere, so the market needs someone who has a good aesthetic sense and can create an upbeat atmosphere. Catchy logos, innovative events, and effective promotional ideas all come from creativity.

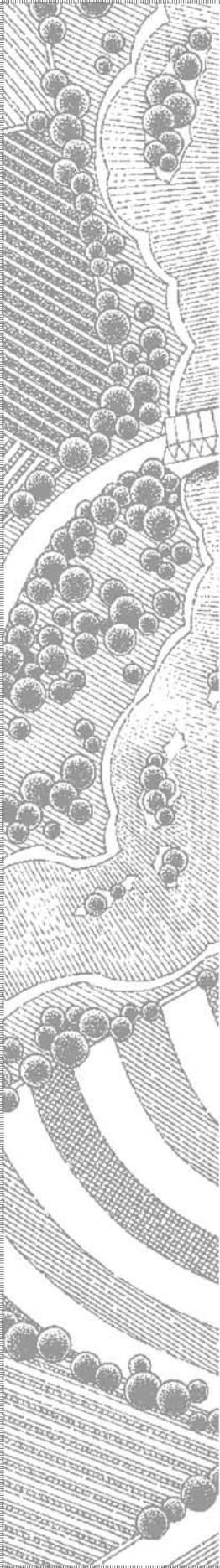
Commitment. The manager must be committed to the market and believe in the value of local, fresh food and direct marketing. She or he also must have the time to commit fully to the job.

Knowledge of farmers market management: The manager will need to have, or quickly gain, an understanding of regulations pertaining to the farmers market and how those regulations affect its operation and performance. The manager also must keep up to date as regulations are modified and new ones are imposed.

Writing a Job Description

Once the board knows the type of individual the market needs and the responsibilities for which the manager will be accountable, members can use that





knowledge to create a job description and evaluate candidates. The hiring process for a farmers market manager is much the same as for any other job. First, the board or top management must determine the time commitment that the market will require—full time or part time—and also estimate how much money is available for compensation. They can then develop a job announcement and an application process, which should include realistic qualifications, the manager's responsibilities, and the salary range. When determining the salary range, remember to leave room in the budget for benefits such as health insurance, annual leave, and retirement. Benefits include the employer's share of Social Security taxes even if the position is part-time and will not include medical or other benefits.

Next, get the word out to potential candidates. Look for applicants within local community groups—colleges with agriculture, nutrition, or community development departments; local food stores; neighboring farmers markets. Post the job description in the local paper, with the state's employment development department, in nonprofit employment magazines, and on appropriate websites. You may be able to take advantage of statewide farmers market or direct-marketing associations to help spread the word. Also, be sure to encourage applications from community members who helped to organize the market. But remember to evaluate them based on competence, not on qualities unrelated to the job. In some cases, this is a matter of law as it is illegal to evaluate and discriminate on the basis of matters unrelated to the job such as age, sex, parenthood, or disability.

Conduct the interviews in a professional manner and be sure to provide candidates with all necessary information about the market. Make sure that the people who conduct the interviews represent the diverse interests of the market. For example, try to have a farmer, an involved community member, and a local business owner on the hiring panel.

Compensation

Ideally, the person who promotes, organizes, manages, and dedicates himself or herself to the market will earn a livable wage in return for that commitment. The pitfalls of an unpaid, volunteer manager include having a manager who cannot do very much beyond basic daily coordination.

Collecting stall fees and directing traffic are day-to-day tasks that a volunteer manager can tackle, but planning promotions, utilizing the media, and building community connections all require substantial time and attention. A volunteer manager's position is likely to be short-term as most people need a paying job that can support them and their families. This can lead to a lack of continuity from year

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to year or, worse still, to the potential that the manager must leave for a paying job in mid-season.

For some smaller markets, vendors have shared the market manager's responsibilities by rotating duties from week to week or from year to year. While smaller markets may have few options, in the long run this alternative can lead to a less successful market. Respecting the hard work of a manager by providing incentives may enable the market, and therefore the vendors, to be more successful and profitable.

The manager's salary can be based on an hourly rate, a flat fee, a percentage of gross market receipts, or a combination of any or all of these arrangements. The manager's salary should be taken into account when making other budget decisions, such as stall fees.

In the short term, management may try recruiting a volunteer or request assistance from the city government or department of agriculture. However, remember that these options are not optimal. Develop a strategic plan to grow the market to the point where you can afford at least a part-time paid manager.

Creating New Working Committees

Once the manager has been hired, the board, with the new manager's help, will need to create working committees to focus on various aspects of start-up. These committees may be continuations of the original working committees that conducted the feasibility study. Now, however, their attention turns from assessment to implementation. Committees can be set up to create market rules, continue vendor recruitment, assist the manager in attaining necessary licenses and permits, design the market's layout and arrangement of stalls, create an advertising and promotion strategy, and prepare special events for opening day. The manager and board of directors may be responsible for setting up the market's finances, budget, and accounting system or the task of assisting the manager can be designated to another working committee. However, the manager and board of directors are ultimately responsible for the market's finances and accounting. The next section of this manual is devoted to the various categories of start-up activities.

