

FREE RESOURCE

Pastoral Search Team Roles & Responsibilities Guide

A practical guide to help churches clarify search team duties, roles, boundaries, and next steps.

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SearchTeamTraining.com

Equipping churches for a wise pastoral search



How to Use This Guide

A pastoral search team serves the church best when its purpose, limits, and responsibilities are clear before the process begins.

This guide is designed to help church leaders and search teams clarify what the team is responsible for, how the team should work together, and what questions should be settled before candidates are contacted. It is not a substitute for your church constitution, bylaws, or denominational guidance, but it can help your team begin with greater wisdom and unity.

Use this guide to:

Clarify expectations, assign roles, identify boundaries, discuss communication, and prepare the team to serve the congregation with integrity and care.

Suggested process

- ☐ Read this guide with church leaders before the first official search team meeting.
- ☐ Discuss the reflection questions as a team before reviewing resumes or contacting candidates.
- ☐ Record agreed-upon roles, responsibilities, and communication practices.
- ☐ Review your church governing documents so the team's work aligns with church polity.
- ☐ Return to this guide when the process becomes complicated or unclear.

Write it down

What does our team need to clarify before we begin?

Who should review this guide with us before the process moves forward?

1. The Purpose of the Search Team

The search team exists to serve the church, not to replace the church. Its purpose is to help guide the process with prayer, clarity, integrity, and practical wisdom.

A healthy search team understands that its work is both spiritual and practical. The team helps the church move through a significant season without unnecessary confusion, rushed decisions, or poor communication. The team should seek the Lord, serve the congregation, protect candidates, and help the church evaluate wisely.

A search team should be able to explain its purpose in a simple sentence. For example: Our search team exists to help the church identify, evaluate, and recommend a qualified pastoral candidate through a wise, prayerful, and orderly process.

Purpose checklist

- ☐ We understand that the team serves the church and remains accountable to the church's leadership and governing documents.
- ☐ We know what decision-making authority the team has and does not have.
- ☐ We have agreed that prayer, biblical qualifications, and church health must shape the process.
- ☐ We know who the team reports to and how updates will be shared.
- ☐ We can clearly explain the purpose of the search team to the congregation.

Write it down

How would we explain the purpose of our search team in one sentence?

Where might confusion arise if our purpose is not clearly stated?

2. The Kind of People Who Should Serve

The effectiveness of the search team depends heavily on the character, wisdom, and maturity of the people serving on it.

Search team members do not need to be perfect, but they do need to be spiritually mature, trustworthy, humble, and committed to the good of the whole church. The team should be able to handle confidential information, evaluate carefully, disagree graciously, and represent the congregation well.

Spiritual maturity

Members should be prayerful, biblically grounded, and committed to the spiritual health of the church.

Trustworthiness

Members must be able to protect confidential information and speak carefully.

Wisdom

Members should be able to think clearly, ask good questions, and avoid impulsive conclusions.

Unity

Members should be willing to listen, work together, and put the church's good above personal preference.

Team member checklist

- ☐ Search team members are known for godly character and church commitment.
- ☐ Team members can maintain confidentiality without creating secrecy or mistrust.
- ☐ The team represents the congregation reasonably well without becoming too large to function.
- ☐ Members are willing to be trained before the process begins.

Write it down

What character qualities are most important for our search team?

Are there voices or perspectives our team needs to include or consult?

3. Core Responsibilities of the Search Team

The search team's work should be clearly defined before resumes, interviews, and candidate conversations begin.

Responsibilities may vary depending on your church's polity, but most search teams are responsible for guiding the process, reviewing candidates, communicating appropriately, and making a recommendation. Clarity on the front end helps prevent confusion later.

Common responsibilities

- ☐ Pray regularly for the church, the team, the candidates, and the next pastor.
- ☐ Help clarify the church's current needs before defining the candidate profile.
- ☐ Develop or review the ministry profile and candidate qualifications.
- ☐ Receive, organize, and review resumes or candidate recommendations.
- ☐ Conduct initial screening conversations and formal interviews.
- ☐ Coordinate references, background checks, and follow-up questions.
- ☐ Communicate appropriate updates to church leadership and congregation.
- ☐ Recommend a candidate according to the church's established process.

Important

The team should not assume authority that has not been clearly given. Before the process begins, confirm what the church constitution, bylaws, leadership structure, and congregational process require.

Write it down

Which responsibilities are clearly assigned to the search team?

Which responsibilities still need clarification from church leadership?

4. What the Search Team Is Not Responsible For

Healthy boundaries protect the team, the candidates, and the church.

A search team can easily become overburdened or overextended if its boundaries are not clear. Some teams begin to function as if they are the final authority over the church's future. Others unintentionally withhold information that should be shared with the right leaders at the right time. Clear boundaries help the process stay healthy.

The search team should not:

- ☐ Act independently from the church's stated process or governing documents.
- ☐ Make promises to candidates that the church has not authorized.
- ☐ Ignore congregational input, church leadership, or established approval steps.
- ☐ Treat personal preferences as if they are biblical qualifications.
- ☐ Share confidential candidate information casually or unnecessarily.
- ☐ Rush the church toward a decision before appropriate evaluation has taken place.
- ☐ Assume that a strong personality, impressive resume, or good interview is enough.

Write it down

What decisions are outside the authority of our search team?
What promises should we avoid making to candidates?
Who can help us stay accountable to our church's process?

5. Suggested Roles Within the Search Team

Defined roles help the team stay organized and prevent every responsibility from falling on one person.

Not every church needs every role listed below, but each responsibility should be assigned to someone. Some people may carry more than one role, especially in smaller churches. The goal is not bureaucracy; the goal is clarity.

Role	Name(s)	Key Duties
Chairperson		Leads meetings, keeps the process moving, and helps maintain order.
Prayer Coordinator		Keeps prayer central and helps the team pray intentionally.
Communication Lead		Coordinates updates to leaders, congregation, and candidates.
Documentation Lead		Maintains records, resumes, notes, and agreed-upon decisions.
Candidate Profile Lead		Helps clarify qualifications, church needs, and candidate criteria.
Interview Coordinator		Schedules interviews and helps prepare questions.
Reference Coordinator		Coordinates references, background checks, and follow-up information.

Write it down

Which roles does our team need to assign?

Which responsibilities are most likely to be overlooked if no one owns them?

6. Communication and Confidentiality

The search team must communicate enough to build trust while protecting sensitive information with care.

One of the most difficult parts of a pastoral search is communication. Too little communication can create suspicion. Too much communication can damage candidates, create confusion, or expose sensitive details. The team needs a clear communication plan before questions and rumors begin.

With the congregation

Share process updates, general timelines, prayer needs, and next steps without exposing candidate details prematurely.

With church leaders

Give appropriate updates to the leaders or body to whom the team is accountable.

With candidates

Communicate clearly, promptly, and respectfully. Avoid vague promises or unexplained delays.

Within the team

Agree on what stays in the room, what can be shared, and who is authorized to speak for the team.

Communication checklist

- ☐ We know who is authorized to communicate on behalf of the team.
- ☐ We have agreed on what information remains confidential.
- ☐ We have a plan for regular congregational updates.
- ☐ We have a process for responding to questions from church members.

Write it down

What should our team communicate regularly to the church?

What information must remain confidential until the proper time?

7. Candidate Evaluation Responsibilities

Candidate evaluation should be thoughtful, consistent, biblical, and fair.

The search team should avoid evaluating candidates only by personality, style, resume strength, or first impressions. The team should establish clear evaluation categories before comparing candidates. This helps the team remain consistent and reduces the danger of being swayed by personal preference.

Evaluation areas

- ☐ Biblical qualifications and spiritual maturity.
- ☐ Doctrinal alignment with the church's convictions.
- ☐ Preaching, teaching, and pastoral care ability.
- ☐ Leadership experience and ministry philosophy.
- ☐ Fit with the church's current needs and season.
- ☐ Family considerations, expectations, and sustainability.
- ☐ References, background checks, and prior ministry relationships.

Evaluation caution

A candidate should never be reduced to a score. Tools can help the team compare consistently, but prayerful wisdom, biblical discernment, and careful conversation still matter.

Write it down

What evaluation categories should our team agree on before reviewing candidates?

Where are we most likely to confuse personal preference with true qualification?

8. Decision-Making and Congregational Process

A wise search team knows how recommendations will be made before it reaches the final stages.

The end of the search process can become emotionally intense. By the time a preferred candidate is identified, people may feel urgency to move quickly. This is why the team should understand the decision-making path early, including who votes, who recommends, what information is shared, and what timeline is required.

Clarify before the final stage

- ☐ Who has authority to recommend a candidate to the church?
- ☐ Who has authority to approve or call the next pastor?
- ☐ What congregational meeting, notice, or vote is required?
- ☐ What information will be shared with the church before a vote?
- ☐ How will the team handle disagreement or minority concerns?
- ☐ What will the team do if no candidate is ready to recommend?
- ☐ What steps happen after a candidate is approved or declined?

Write it down

What is the official decision-making process in our church?
What needs to be clarified before we reach the final candidate stage?
How will we communicate the final recommendation with clarity and care?

9. Roles and Responsibilities Worksheet

Use this page to record what your team has agreed on before the process moves forward.

Team purpose statement

Assigned team roles

Role	Name(s)	Key Duties
Chairperson		Lead meetings and keep the process moving.
Prayer Coordinator		Guide the team in intentional prayer.
Communication Lead		Coordinate updates and official communication.
Documentation Lead		Maintain records and decisions.
Interview Coordinator		Coordinate interview scheduling and preparation.
Reference Coordinator		Coordinate references and follow-up information.

Open questions we still need to answer

Final Readiness Review

Before your search team begins reviewing candidates, pause and make sure these foundational questions have been answered.

Final checklist

- ☐ We can clearly state the purpose of the search team.
- ☐ We know who the team reports to and how decisions are made.
- ☐ We have assigned key roles within the team.
- ☐ We have agreed on confidentiality and communication expectations.
- ☐ We have clarified what the team is not authorized to do.
- ☐ We have identified how candidates will be evaluated consistently.
- ☐ We understand the church's process for recommendation, approval, and communication.
- ☐ We know what questions still need to be answered before the search begins.

Next step

If your church would benefit from help clarifying roles, training the team, or walking through the pastoral search process with wisdom and structure, Search Team Training can help.

[Schedule a Discovery Call](#)

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