

FREE RESOURCE

Pastoral Search Team Readiness Checklist

A practical tool to help your church
begin the pastoral search process with
wisdom, clarity, and unity.

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SearchTeamTraining.com

Equipping churches for a wise pastoral search



How to Use This Checklist

This resource is designed to help church leaders and pastoral search teams slow down, clarify responsibilities, and prepare wisely before the process becomes complicated.

Purpose

Use this checklist before resumes are reviewed, interviews are scheduled, or strong opinions begin to form. It is not a substitute for your church constitution, bylaws, denominational guidance, or legal counsel. It is a practical readiness tool to help your church ask better questions early.

Recommended Use

- ☐ Review this resource with church leaders before the search team begins its work.
- ☐ Use it with the search team during the first meeting or training session.
- ☐ Mark items as complete, unclear, or not yet addressed.
- ☐ Identify the 3-5 issues that need attention before moving forward.
- ☐ Create a written next-step plan so the team begins with clarity, not assumptions.

Who should review this checklist before the search team begins its work?

What is the biggest area of uncertainty in our church's search process right now?

Readiness Snapshot

Before your church moves deeper into the search, take a quick inventory. This page helps you see whether your church is ready to begin, needs clarification, or should pause before moving forward.

Readiness Area	Ready	Needs Clarity	Not Yet
Church leaders agree on how the search process will begin.			
The church understands who has authority to appoint or approve the search team.			
The search team role has been clearly defined.			
The team has been spiritually and practically prepared for the work.			
Confidentiality expectations have been explained in writing.			
A basic communication plan with the congregation has been discussed.			
The church has clarified its current needs before defining the ideal candidate.			
The team understands how candidates will be reviewed and evaluated.			
The church has a realistic process and timeline.			
The team knows when to ask for outside help or guidance.			

How to Read the Results

If most items are marked Ready, your church may be prepared to begin. If several items are marked Needs Clarity or Not Yet, slow down and address those areas before the search gets more complicated.

1. Clarify the Church's Current Need

A healthy search begins before the first resume is reviewed. The church should be honest about its current condition, ministry priorities, and leadership needs.

Before moving forward, has your church clarified these areas?

- ☐ We have discussed the church's current health, challenges, and ministry needs.
- ☐ We have identified the kind of pastoral leadership the church needs in this season.
- ☐ We have distinguished between biblical qualifications and personal preferences.
- ☐ We have considered whether the church needs stability, revitalization, shepherding, teaching, organizational leadership, or transition help.
- ☐ We have avoided defining the next pastor only by comparing him to the previous pastor.
- ☐ We have created space for honest conversation among church leaders before the search team begins.

Write It Down

What are the three most important needs our next pastor must be prepared to address?

Which preferences might need to be held loosely during the search?

What realities about our church's health or ministry context should we name honestly?

What would a pastor need to understand about our church before accepting a call?

2. Form the Search Team Wisely

The search team should be selected carefully. The right team can help protect the church's unity, credibility, and decision-making process.

Before finalizing the team, consider whether each statement is true.

- ☐ Team members meet any requirements listed in the church constitution or bylaws.
- ☐ Team members are spiritually mature, trustworthy, and committed to the good of the church.
- ☐ The team represents the church well without becoming too large to function effectively.
- ☐ Potential conflicts of interest have been discussed and addressed.
- ☐ Team members understand the seriousness and confidentiality of the role.
- ☐ The church has communicated how the team was selected and what it is responsible to do.

Write It Down

What qualities matter most for search team members in our church?

Are there any potential conflicts or concerns that should be addressed now?

Who in our church carries the wisdom, trust, and maturity needed for this responsibility?

What expectations should every team member understand before agreeing to serve?

3. Establish a Spiritual Posture

A pastoral search is not merely an organizational task. The team should approach the process with prayer, humility, dependence on Scripture, and concern for the unity of the church.

Use these statements to assess the team's spiritual preparation.

- ☐ The team has committed to pray regularly throughout the process.
- ☐ The team has discussed the seriousness of calling a pastor to shepherd the church.
- ☐ The team is seeking wisdom rather than simply trying to find a candidate quickly.
- ☐ The team is willing to submit preferences to biblical priorities.
- ☐ The team has identified ways to guard unity, humility, and patience.
- ☐ The church has been encouraged to pray for the team, the candidates, and the process.

Write It Down

What regular prayer rhythm should our team establish?

What attitudes or assumptions could harm the process if not addressed early?

What Scriptures should shape our posture throughout this search?

How will we respond if the process takes longer or becomes harder than expected?

4. Define Roles and Boundaries

Confusion grows when people do not know who is responsible for what. Before the search begins, clarify authority, responsibility, and communication lines.

Make sure these role questions are answered.

- ☐ We know what authority the search team has and what authority it does not have.
- ☐ We know how the search team relates to pastors, elders, deacons, staff, trustees, or other leaders.
- ☐ We know who approves expenses, travel, background checks, and other process-related costs.
- ☐ We know who communicates with candidates and who speaks for the team.
- ☐ We know how recommendations will be brought to church leadership and/or the congregation.
- ☐ We have identified decisions that require broader church approval.

Write It Down

Where could confusion arise if roles are not clearly defined?

Who needs to approve or confirm the team's responsibilities before the process begins?

What decisions can the team make, and what decisions require broader approval?

How will we document and communicate role boundaries to the team and church?

5. Protect Confidentiality and Communication

Confidentiality and communication must work together. The church needs appropriate updates, but candidate information must be handled with care.

Discuss and agree on these practices before the process begins.

- ☐ Every team member understands what information must remain confidential.
- ☐ The team has agreed not to discuss candidates with spouses, friends, or uninvolved church members.
- ☐ The team knows how resumes, notes, references, and candidate information will be stored securely.
- ☐ The team has agreed on who will provide updates to the church.
- ☐ The team has discussed what information should and should not be shared publicly.
- ☐ The team has prepared a simple way to communicate during quiet seasons, delays, or ongoing prayer needs.

Write It Down

What information should never be shared outside the team?

What regular update rhythm would serve our church well?

How will we respond if someone asks for information we cannot share?

What communication will help the congregation stay informed without violating candidate privacy?

6. Build a Candidate Profile Carefully

The candidate profile should help the team evaluate wisely. It should be rooted in biblical qualifications, the church's needs, and the ministry context rather than vague preferences.

Use these items before creating or posting a profile.

- ☐ We have reviewed biblical qualifications for pastoral leadership.
- ☐ We have identified the church's current ministry priorities and leadership needs.
- ☐ We have separated required qualifications from preferred qualities.
- ☐ We have considered doctrine, preaching, shepherding, leadership, experience, and character.
- ☐ We have avoided language that is unclear, unrealistic, or unnecessarily restrictive.
- ☐ We have confirmed that the profile reflects the church's actual needs, not only personal preferences.

Write It Down

What qualifications are truly essential?

What preferences should be discussed but not allowed to control the process?

How will we make sure our candidate profile reflects biblical priorities rather than preferences?

What qualities would be helpful but should not become deal breakers?

7. Set a Process and Timeline

A clear process helps the team avoid rushing, drifting, or making decisions based only on emotion. The timeline should be realistic, flexible, and understood by the team.

Before beginning, clarify the process steps.

- ☐ We have outlined the major stages of the search process.
- ☐ We have discussed when resumes will be received, reviewed, and narrowed.
- ☐ We have identified when interviews, references, background checks, and candidate visits may happen.
- ☐ We have agreed that the process may take longer than expected.
- ☐ We have built in time for prayer, discussion, and careful evaluation.
- ☐ We know what conditions would cause us to pause or seek additional guidance.

Write It Down

What timeline are we assuming, and is it realistic?

Where are we most likely to feel pressure to rush?

What checkpoints should we build in before moving to the next stage?

Who will keep the team accountable to the agreed process and timeline?

8. Prepare to Evaluate Candidates

Candidate evaluation should be consistent, fair, and prayerful. The team should decide how candidates will be reviewed before individual opinions become too strong.

Use these items before reviewing candidates.

- ☐ We have agreed on how resumes and ministry profiles will be reviewed.
- ☐ We have developed common evaluation categories for all candidates.
- ☐ We have prepared interview questions that connect to the church's needs.
- ☐ We have decided how references will be contacted and documented.
- ☐ We have discussed how to handle disagreement within the team.
- ☐ We have committed to evaluating candidates by biblical priorities and ministry fit, not personality alone.

Write It Down

What evaluation categories should every candidate be measured by?

How will we handle disagreement in a way that protects unity?

What questions will help us evaluate character, doctrine, preaching, and shepherding?

How will we guard against being overly impressed by personality or presentation?

Next Steps for Your Church

Use this final page to turn your checklist into action. The goal is not simply to identify gaps, but to decide what needs to happen before your church moves forward.

Our Top Readiness Priorities

1. What is the most important issue we need to clarify before the search begins?

2. What step should be taken in the next 7 days?

3. Who is responsible for following up?

When Outside Help May Be Wise

Consider outside guidance if your church is unsure how to form the search team, lacks a clear process, is dealing with conflict, needs help preparing the team, or wants support during candidate evaluation and communication.

Need help preparing your search team?

Search Team Training offers readiness consultation, team training, and process coaching to help churches move forward with wisdom, clarity, and unity.

Schedule a discovery call at SearchTeamTraining.com/contact