



Estrella Baptist Association

Senior Pastor Search Committee Handbook

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FOREWORD

As followers of Jesus Christ, we understand that the calling of a pastor is one of the most sacred tasks entrusted to the local church. The process of discerning, selecting, and affirming a new shepherd is both a spiritual and practical journey—one that requires prayer, patience, integrity, and dependence on the Lord's wisdom (James 1:5). This handbook was created by the Estrella Baptist Association to assist churches across our network in conducting pastor searches that honor Christ, serve His people, and strengthen our collective mission to make disciples in Arizona and beyond. It draws from biblical principles, trusted denominational practices, and proven methods used by healthy churches and networks across the country. My prayer is that every church using this guide will find not only a faithful pastor but also renewed unity, vision, and hope for the future. May God bless your search with His perfect timing and grace.

In His Service,

Dr. Rodney L. Hammer
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SECTION 1 — INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

Biblical Foundation (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2–3; Ephesians 4:11–12). Pastoral leadership is a sacred calling. Every pastor search must be bathed in prayer, guided by Scripture, and conducted in unity of spirit.

Purpose of this Handbook: Equip EBA churches to conduct healthy, Spirit-led, professional searches that integrate LifeWay, Vanderbloemen, Leadership Network best practices with Arizona context.

Role of the Association: Consultation, training, prayer support, community/church assessments, vetted referrals via Arizona Baptist and evangelical networks.

Guiding Principles: Prayerful Dependence (James 1:5); Unity & Confidentiality (Phil. 2:2); Biblical & Missional Alignment (Titus 1:5–9); Transparency & Counsel (Prov. 11:14).

Tools to Use (see Appendix): Committee Covenant; Meeting Minutes Template; Master Search Checklist.



SECTION 2 — OVERVIEW OF THE SEARCH PROCESS

Eight Phases: 1) Prayer & Stabilization, 2) Organization & Preparation, 3) Discovery & Assessment, 4) Profile & Role Definition, 5) Sourcing & Networking, 6) Screening & Evaluation, 7) Presentation & Call, 8) Offer & Onboarding.

Ideal Timeline (18–24 weeks): Each phase includes milestones and deliverables.

Roles & Responsibilities: Search Committee, Interim Pastor, Staff/Elders, Congregation, EBA Consultant.

Tools to Use (see Appendix): Master Search Process Checklist; Candidate Tracking Sheet.

******See Appendix for detailed explanation and suggested implementation of the Eight Phases of the Search Process (PAGES 15-20)**



SECTION 3 — SEARCH COMMITTEE FORMATION & COVENANT

Composition: 7–9 members, spiritually mature (Acts 6:3), diverse representation; exclude staff and staff family to avoid conflicts.

Covenant Commitments: Prayer, confidentiality, unity, integrity, diligence. Establish decision-making protocols and minutes.

Meeting Practices: Open with Scripture/prayer; keep written minutes; quorum; secure file storage.

Tools to Use (see Appendix): Committee Covenant; Confidentiality Agreement; Meeting Minutes Template.



SECTION 4 — CHURCH & COMMUNITY ANALYSIS TOOLKIT

Purpose: Understand church health and Arizona community context (Luke 4:18–19).

Community Study (AZ focus): demographics, economics, education, spiritual climate, community needs, outreach opportunities (e.g., Buckeye, Surprise, Goodyear, Avondale).

Church Health Assessment: worship, discipleship, evangelism, leadership, generosity, community impact.

Congregational Survey: strengths, needs, desired pastor qualities, five-year vision.

Tools to Use (see Appendix): Community Study Worksheet; Church Health Assessment; Congregational Input Survey.



SECTION 5 — CANDIDATE PROFILE & ROLE DEFINITION

Biblical Foundation (Eph. 4:11–12; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).

Role Description: Preaching/teaching, vision, shepherding, staff oversight, evangelism/mission, administration, denominational partnership.

Qualifications: Conversion/call, character, theology, leadership experience, SBC cooperation, cultural intelligence for multi-ethnic and bilingual communities.

Role Scorecard: Preaching 25%; Leadership 20%; Pastoral Care 15%; Missional Engagement 15%; Doctrine & Integrity 15%; Cultural Fit 10%.

Tools to Use (see Appendix): Role Scorecard; Doctrinal Questionnaire; Leadership Competency Checklist; Sample Job Posting.



SECTION 6 — CANDIDATE SOURCING & NETWORKING

Biblical Foundation (Acts 13:2–3; Prov. 11:14).

Primary Strategy: Arizona Baptist & evangelical relationships first—EBA referrals, AZ Mission Network, partner associations, Phoenix & Gateway Seminaries, peer pastors.

Secondary Strategy: SBC Job Board, TGC Jobs, ChurchStaffing, JustChurchJobs; executive search as needed.

Communication Templates: Recommendation Request Letter; Posting Template.

Tools to Use (see Appendix): Recommendation Request Letter; Job Posting Template; Candidate Tracking Sheet.



SECTION 7 — INTERVIEW & EVALUATION PROCESS

Biblical Foundation (Prov. 18:13; 1 Thess. 5:21).

Phases: Initial screen (fit/calling), panel interview (leadership/preaching/vision), on-site interview & preaching.

Structured Questions: Calling/spiritual life; preaching/teaching; leadership/vision; evangelism/community; family/balance.

Evaluation Tools: Interview Rubric; Sermon Evaluation Form; alignment to Role Scorecard.

Tools to Use (see Appendix): Interview Questions; Candidate Evaluation Rubric; Sermon Evaluation Form.



SECTION 8 — DUE DILIGENCE & REFERENCE VERIFICATION

Biblical Foundation (Prov. 22:1; 1 Tim. 5:22).

360° References: supervisor/elder chair, peer staff, lay leader, congregant, personal reference.

Background Verification: criminal/sex-offender, education/employment, credit (if finances), social media review, doctrinal confirmation; obtain consent.

Red Flags: short tenures, unresolved conflict, ambiguous doctrine, resistance to accountability.

Tools to Use (see Appendix): 360° Reference Form; Background Verification Checklist; Candidate Consent Form.



SECTION 9 — CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Biblical Foundation (Prov. 15:22; Eph. 4:3; 1 Cor. 14:40).

Principles: transparency without breach; consistency; hopeful tone; prayer emphasis.

Updates: monthly written updates; scheduled Q&A forums; publish prayer guide.

Tools to Use (see Appendix): Congregational Update Template; Prayer Guide.



SECTION 10 — FINALIST WEEKEND & CALL PROCESS

Biblical Foundation (Acts 13:2–3; Phil. 2:1–4).

Purpose: mutual discernment and cultural fit.

Sample Schedule: Fri dinner (committee), Sat staff/leadership interviews & Q&A, Sun preaching & vote.

Voting Procedure: membership qualification, secret ballot, 75–85% affirmation recommended.

Tools to Use (see Appendix): Weekend Schedule Template; Ballot Sample.



SECTION 11 — OFFER, TRANSITION & ONBOARDING

Biblical Foundation (1 Tim. 5:17–18; Heb. 13:17; Phil. 1:3–6).

Offer Letter: compensation/benefits, start date/relocation, evaluation schedule.

Transition Checklist: installation service with EBA, relocation assistance, introductions, community engagement.

Onboarding: 90-day plan, first-year evaluation, coaching/mentoring via EBA.

Tools to Use (see Appendix): Offer Letter Template; 90-Day Plan Template; First-Year Review & Coaching Form.



SECTION 12 — PROCESS, FORMS & TEMPLATES APPENDIX

All forms follow with one form per page; fields are fillable (plain white) for digital completion or printable for handwriting.



EBA Senior Pastor Recommended 8 Phase Search Process

Phase 1 — Pray, Stabilize, and Organize (Weeks 0-2)

1. **Prayer & posture.** Lead the church to a season of prayer and fasting for unity and clarity.
2. **Interim plan.** Clarify pulpit supply, staff authority, and decision rights during the vacancy.
3. **Constitute the Search Team.** Aim for 7–9 spiritually mature, broadly representative members; adopt a code of conduct (confidentiality, conflict-of-interest, communication protocols). LifeWay's *Pastor Search Committee Handbook* offers a proven committee framework and forms.
4. **Hire/engage outside counsel (optional).** If you want third-party rigor for screening, reference/background checks, and facilitation, note how firms like Vanderbloemen structure due diligence (360° references, criminal/credit/education/social media verification).

Phase 2 — Know Your Church & Community (Weeks 2-5)

1. **Church health snapshot.** Attendance, giving, groups, serving, baptisms, multi-site/plants, ethnic makeup, age distribution, staffing chart and budget.
2. **Community study**
 - **Metro reality:** Phoenix metro is growing—especially by migration (international and exurban growth). Understand where your people are moving and where new families are landing.
 - **Religious landscape:** AZ adults are majority Christian but with high “nones,” especially in metro Phoenix; tailor outreach and preaching to a mixed audience.
3. **Congregational input.** Run a church-wide survey/listening sessions to capture hopes, concerns, and desired leader qualities (LifeWay provides sample forms and tools in the handbook toolbox).
4. **Role clarity:** Draft a **Biblical/Theological Profile and Role Scorecard** (mission outcomes, preaching/leadership/evangelism expectations, culture fit, staff development, community engagement, governance alignment).

Consider bilingual ministry experience (Spanish/English), cross-cultural competence, and missional savvy in a rapidly diversifying population.

Phase 3 — Candidate Sourcing Strategy (Weeks 4-12)



Cast a *targeted* net in places that consistently yield qualified, long-tenure candidates:

- **Denominational pipelines & local networks**
- **Arizona Mission Network (AZSBC / AZMN) Resume Service & job listings.**
 - **SBC national job board.**
 - **Seminary pipelines (regional fit matters)**
 - **Phoenix Seminary** (local network; pastors already contextualized to the Southwest).
 - **Gateway Seminary** (SoCal—strong SBC pipeline; easy AZ relocation) & its job board (also lists AZ churches).
 - **Broad evangelical job boards**
 - **The Gospel Coalition Jobs, ChurchStaffing, JustChurchJobs**, (use theological filters where possible).
 - **Executive search** (optional): Vanderbloemen can widen reach and add robust vetting.

Phase 4 — Screen & Shortlist (Weeks 6-14)

Intake screen (paper):

- Use an objective rubric aligned to your Role Scorecard (doctrine, preaching samples, leadership tenure, church health trends where they served).
- Apply “blind” elements where possible to reduce bias (Vanderbloemen warns against aesthetic/degree bias; build guardrails).

Video/phone screen (30-45 min):

- Calling narrative, theology overview, preaching philosophy, staff development, evangelism/mission engagement in secularizing contexts, Arizona relocation factors.

Deep-dive interview (75-90 min, panel):

- Case studies (conflict resolution, church discipline, budget shortfall, staff restructure), evangelism pipeline, disciple-making system, leadership pipeline.

Artifacts to request:

- 2-3 full sermon videos, a multi-year preaching plan outline, org charts they led, sample elder/leadership communications, vision documents.



Tip: Many search processes now include social-media/online presence review as a standard reference point.

Phase 5 — Due Diligence (Weeks 8–16)

Run the full diligence package on finalists—this is where many churches cut corners.

- **References (structured 360°).** Supervisor, peer, subordinate, elder/board, and 2–3 lay leaders; ask leadership-style, integrity, follow-through, conflict history, and “coachability” questions. (Vanderbloemen offers current guidance and question sets.)
 - **Background checks** (criminal nationwide, sex-offender, education/employment verification; credit if fiduciary duties apply). LifeWay’s OneSource program (with CIA) is a well-known church solution and has up-to-date pricing and FAQs.
 - **Abuse-prevention training linkage.** In 2025 LifeWay noted free sexual-abuse awareness training bundled with background checks; SB churches report increased usage—make it a standard.
 - **Succession & transition signals.** Draw lessons from established succession guidance (Leadership Network/XPastor ecosystems and the *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* framework).

Why diligence matters now: recent Barna data showed high pastoral stress and mobility; your checks protect the flock and the candidate.

Phase 6 — Congregational Communication & Unity (All phases)

- Publish a transparent **process timeline** (without naming early candidates), monthly updates, prayer guides, and FAQs. LifeWay resources include sample letters/forms to keep the church aligned.
- Hold periodic prayer nights and briefings; keep elders/deacons aligned.

Phase 7 — Finalist Experience & Discernment (Weeks 12–18)

1. **Confidential site visit** (2–3 leaders travel to hear preaching in the wild and meet references on their turf).
2. **On-site finalist weekend** (candidate + spouse): staff/elder interviews, town hall, Q&A, meet key lay leaders and community partners; preach once (avoid four sermons that drain discernment).



3. **Decision protocol:** elder recommendation → congregational vote (clear bylaws threshold and balloting method) → offer with compensation package and start date.

Phase 8 — Offer, Transition & First-Year Onboarding (Weeks 16+)

- **Written offer:** salary/benefits, moving, sabbath rhythms, evaluation cadence, renewal leave policy, preaching load, goals for 90/180/365 days.
- **Onboarding plan:** listening tour, staff/elder retreats, strategic plan refresh, clear “first wins,” and a coach/mentor. (Barna highlights pastoral support systems as a factor in flourishing—build it in.)

What to Look For (Traits of Long-Tenured Pastors in AZ)

- **Orthodox theology & clear gospel emphasis** with evangelistic zeal in a mixed-belief environment.
- **Expository preaching** with cultural intelligence (Spanish-aware, interfaith-neighbor savvy, secular audience clarity).
- **Proven leadership** of staff and volunteers; built groups/discipleship/sending pipelines.
- **Character and resilience** with healthy rhythms (given national burnout signals).
- **Community presence** in fast-growing, edge-city/exurban contexts (new rooftops = mission fields).

Where to Look (Quick Links)

- **AZ-specific:** Arizona Mission Network (resume service + postings).
- **Seminaries near & networked with AZ:** Phoenix Seminary; Gateway Seminary (post to their boards and mine candidates already acclimated to the Southwest).
- **National boards:** SBC Jobs; The Gospel Coalition Jobs; ChurchStaffing; JustChurchJobs (filter for SBC/evangelical alignment).
- **Executive search (optional):** Vanderbloemen—broad reach and structured vetting.



Evaluation Toolkit

- **Doctrinal questionnaire:** Trinity, Scripture, soteriology, marriage/sexual ethics, spiritual gifts, church discipline, SBC cooperation, complementarian/egalitarian practice, ordinances, polity.
- **Leadership & culture interview:** conflict case, staff development, elder dynamics, budget/finance philosophy, multi-service/multi-site, change management.
- **Preaching assessment:** clarity, biblical fidelity, gospel connection, cultural engagement, application, time discipline; review 2–3 *full* sermons.
- **Reference questions (360°)** (adapt from Vanderbloemen's current guidance): leadership style, integrity under pressure, teamwork, blind spots, follow-through, reason for leaving, rehire willingness.
- **Due diligence:** background checks (criminal/sex-offender, education/employment verification; credit if handling finances); Lifeway OneSource/CIA is a church-friendly pathway with current pricing and FAQs.

Common Pitfalls (and how to avoid them)

- **Vague profile** → Craft a scorecard before reading resumes. (Vanderbloemen cautions against bias & lack of parameters.)
- **Weak diligence** → Do full references & checks; don't skip because "we know them."
- **Rushed timeline** → Communicate milestones; use interim and prayer season wisely (LifeWay's phased approach helps).
- **Poor congregational comms** → Regular updates and prayer nights to preserve unity (templates in LifeWay tools).

Suggested Timeline (adjust to church size)

- **Weeks 0–2:** Organize team, interim plan, prayer launch
- **Weeks 2–5:** Church/community study, survey, role scorecard
- **Weeks 4–12:** Sourcing & intake screening
- **Weeks 6–14:** Video screens & panel interviews
- **Weeks 8–16:** Due diligence on finalists
- **Weeks 12–18:** Finalist visit, preach, vote, offer



- **Months 1-12 (post-hire):** Onboarding, coaching, first-year goals

Templates & Guides to pull:

- **LifeWay Pastor Search Committee Handbook** (forms, letters, rankings, candidate presentation/orientation tools).
- **State convention guides** (e.g., SBTC/KY Baptist handbooks) for extra checklists and interview questions.
- **Succession reading** (*Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* + XPastor/Leadership Network articles) to steer transition health.



Committee Covenant Form

Commitment to Prayer	
Commitment to Confidentiality	
Commitment to Unity	
Conflict of Interest Disclosure	
Signature / Date	



Meeting Minutes Template

Date/Time	
Attendees (Quorum?)	
Scripture/Prayer	
Agenda Items	
Decisions/Actions	
Next Meeting	



Confidentiality Agreement

Member Name	
Scope of Confidentiality	
Exceptions (Legal/Ethical)	
Signature / Date	



Community Study Worksheet

City/Neighborhood	
Population/Demographics	
Economy/Employers	
Education/Schools	
Spiritual Climate/Churches	
Community Needs/Opportunities	



Church Health Assessment

Worship (attendance/engagement)	
Discipleship (groups %)	
Evangelism (baptisms/outreach)	
Leadership (staff/lay)	
Generosity (budget/missions)	
Community Impact (partnerships)	



Congregational Input Survey

Church Strengths	
Key Needs	
Desired Pastor Qualities (Top 3)	
Community Outreach Ideas	
Five-Year Vision Hopes	



Senior Pastor Role Scorecard

Preaching (25%)	
Leadership (20%)	
Pastoral Care (15%)	
Missional Engagement (15%)	
Doctrine & Integrity (15%)	
Cultural Fit (10%)	



Doctrinal Questionnaire

Scripture	
Trinity	
Salvation	
Church/Ordinances	
Marriage/Sexual Ethics	
Spiritual Gifts	
Polity/Elders/Deacons	
Cooperation (SBC/EBA)	



Leadership Competency Checklist

Vision & Strategy	
Team Development	
Change Management	
Conflict Resolution	
Communication	
Stewardship & Administration	



Recommendation Request Letter Template

Recipient	
Body (purpose, qualities sought, confidentiality)	
Contact & Deadline	



Job Posting Template

Church Summary	
Role Summary	
Qualifications	
How to Apply	



Interview Question Form

Calling/Spiritual Life	
Preaching/Teaching	
Leadership/Vision	
Evangelism/Community	
Family/Balance	



Candidate Evaluation Rubric

Doctrinal Alignment	
Preaching Ability	
Leadership Vision	
Relational Wisdom	
Cultural Fit	
Overall Assessment	



Sermon Evaluation Form

Text/Series	
Scriptural Accuracy	
Clarity/Structure	
Application/Illustration	
Gospel Focus	
Observations	



360° Reference Check Form

Reference Name/Role	
Relationship Duration	
Strengths	
Growth Areas	
Conflict Handling	
Rehire Willingness	



Background Verification Checklist

Criminal/Sex-Offender	
Education/Employment	
Credit (if applicable)	
Social Media Review	
Doctrinal Confirmation	



Candidate Consent Form

Candidate Name	
Authorization Scope	
Signature / Date	



Congregational Update Template

Update Number/Date	
Summary of Progress	
Prayer Requests	
Next Steps	



Prayer Guide Sample Sheet

Unity	
Wisdom	
Future Pastor & Family	
Community Impact	



Finalist Weekend Schedule

Friday (Dinner)	
Saturday (Staff/Leaders/Q&A)	
Sunday (Preach/Vote)	



Ballot Sample

Member Name (optional)	
Affirm (Yes/No)	
Comments	



Offer Letter Template

Candidate Name	
Compensation/Benefits	
Start Date/Relocation	
Evaluation Schedule	
Signature Lines	



90-Day Plan Template

Listening Tour	
Preaching Plan	
Team Development	
Community Engagement	



First-Year Review & Coaching Form

Quarterly Goals	
Progress Notes	
Coaching/Support	
Next Steps	



Candidate Tracking Spreadsheet

Candidate Name	
Stage	
Notes	
Decision	



Master Search Process Checklist

Phase 1–8 Milestones	
Completed?	
Owner	
Due Date	

