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**SKILLS REQUIRED OF A DATABASE  
MANAGER**

# Skills Required of a Database Manager

Written by Wes Trochlil

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Increasingly I'm hearing from my clients that they want to create a position designed to manage the database. In the old days, they called them database administrators (DBA), which was a mostly technical job focused on keeping the database running (think auto mechanic). But what most associations really need is a database manager (DBM).

The DBM has three primary functions: ensuring that staff know how to use the database; ensuring that all data is being collected and managed in the central data management system; and understanding the business of the association. Lets look at each of these.

**Ensuring staff know how to use the database** Simply put, this comes down to documentation and training. I've written scads about this over the years; my most successful clients are those organizations that have taken the time to document their business processes and to provide association-specific training to their staff. The DBM is a key player in this process. The DBM should work with staff to create the documentation and training that will be used throughout the life of the database. A very skilled DBM can also provide that training.

**Ensuring data is collected and managed in the database** One of the biggest challenges any organization faces is ensuring that staff use the central database for all of the data being managed at the organization. (Even the most successful associations struggle with this, as I outlined in my white paper on the Nine Keys to Long Term Success of Your AMS, which you can find here.) The DBMs job is to sniff out rogue databases (e.g., Outlook distribution lists, stand alone databases in Excel or Access, or even Word documents), find out how this information is being used, and work with the staff to get that information back into the central system.

**Understanding the business of the association** This is probably the most critical skill. Successfully managing the database cannot be done in a vacuum. That is, your DBM needs to know what your organizations mission is and how the data is being used to support that mission. For example, many associations have, as part of their strategic mission, increasing engagement among the members and the broader public.

Given that mission, the DBM will ask How can we use the database and the data we have to address that objective?

Given these skills, what kind of characteristics should associations look for when trying to fill this position? In this order, they include:

- **Communication skills** – Yes, the famous interpersonal skills are all-important for this position. The DBM will be interacting with all staff at all levels, and thus must have the interpersonal skills required to do that. In addition, he or she will have to work with your database vendor and be able to communicate exactly what kind of help is needed.
- **Business acumen** – A good DBM understands that the database and the data it contains is a means to an end, not an end unto itself. Before figuring out how to collect data, a good DBM will always ask Why are we collecting this data? and relate that to the needs of the association.
- **Technical skills** – Thats right, of the three skill sets, technical skills are the least important. Of course, a good DBM will know how to use the database; he or she will be able to navigate around the system and will have a good sense of how things are related. But a good DBM does not need high level technical programming skills (though they are helpful). Technical skills are a commodity and can be purchased at a moments notice, if needed.

The increasing demand for DBMs is a good thing. The association management software market has matured to the point that associations are moving from simply selecting appropriate software to actually leveraging that software to advance the associations mission. A good DBM can help associations do just that.

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## About the Author

For more than 20 years, Wes Trochlil has worked in and with dozens of associations and membership organizations providing a range of consulting services, from general consulting on data management issues to full-scale, association-wide selection and implementation of association management systems. Follow Wes on Twitter @westrochlil. His website is [www.effectivedatabase.com](http://www.effectivedatabase.com)

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