

Finding the Job Candidates You Want

It will happen. An integral member of your team will move on from your organization, leaving in her place a big hole for your nonprofit to fill. You think, “How will we ever replace her?”



That’s a good question. Stiff competition exists for today’s best and brightest, and jumping into the fray to develop a candidate pool can seem like a futile exercise. But creating a strategy before attempting to fill the talent pool will not only help you find someone to fill an opening, but also put you in a better position for the next time someone leaves.

In building this strategy, the search committee should first ask itself questions like: how can we target the right individuals, including both those who might be candidates and those who might be good sources of candidates? How can we ensure that we are reaching candidates beyond the usual suspects? Whom do we know who might know those individuals?

To help get at answers to these questions, a good candidate sourcing strategy helps an organization do four things:

1. Determine who it already knows
2. Research who it wants to know
3. Tap networks with people the organization wants to know or whom it wants to have as advocates during the search process
4. Build awareness of the opportunities available in the organization

Taken in this direction, the outreach process becomes a “network development campaign,” through which your nonprofit isn’t only looking to fill one position on a team but is using the open position as an opportunity to pull in talent for potential future openings, too.

Take Stock of Whom You Already Know

To begin, an effective search committee will take stock of whom it already knows. On a document in table format, the committee creates columns for committee members' names; the individuals they'd like to contact; the reason for the referral (e.g., 10 years' experience as a CFO); and general comments (i.e., notes about the interaction the committee member had with the individual, etc. and outcomes of conversations). This becomes the committee's living document, growing over the course of the search. It also becomes a powerful tool for future searches (imagine those individuals you would like to recommend for a different opportunity, even if they weren't ideal for this one) or simply for building the organization's networks.

When search team members do reach out to their contacts or potential sources of candidates, make sure the team is in clear agreement on the top three to five characteristics of the ideal candidate. Consistently evaluating candidates against the same three to five characteristics allows the team to focus on the most qualified candidates.

Of course, you will want to go beyond the personal networks of your committee members to broaden your candidate reach. Social media and affinity or professional groups provide other channels for sourcing candidates.

Use Social Media to Promote Jobs and Find Candidates

Tools such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter can serve two purposes in sourcing candidates. One, they can help promote your organization to potential candidates, and two, they can be used as tools to find candidates.

With more than 400 million users worldwide as of April 2016, LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network, making it a must for nonprofits on the hunt for new talent. Nonprofits can create free "[Company Pages](#)" on LinkedIn, which other LinkedIn members can follow, to create visibility for their organizations' mission and services, press, blog posts, new hires, job opportunities, and more. Through its paid service, [LinkedIn Recruiter](#), nonprofits can search for people with specific skills and expertise.

Facebook offers nonprofits the ability to engage followers, and potential talent, in a widespread, personal way by allowing you to tell the story of your organization. Some ways organizations are doing this is by sharing behind-the-scenes looks into their cultures, work, and histories. Others highlight descriptive stories and photos, success stories, and developments in their fields.

Nonprofits also are using Twitter to build community and engage in relevant conversations. Some organizations even use it to source and recruit candidates as part of their overall social media strategy. One such organization is NPR, which put Twitter at the center of its recruitment strategy by promoting open positions and creating an account that gives an inside look at working for the organization.

In a 2015 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management, which looked at nonprofit and for-profit use of social media in recruiting and selection, 84 percent of organization said they use social networking sites to recruit candidates. Those who do not use social media to recruit employees cite worry over legal risks or discovering protected information that would prevent an equal employment opportunity, and not having enough HR staff time to use these tools in addition to the others they are using, as reasons for their hesitation.

Legal fears are understandable, and as social media gains more traction as a recruiting tool, nonprofits need to consider the potential legal liabilities of using it for this purpose. For example, eliminating someone from your list of potential candidates based on information found through a social media website could open your organization up to accusations of discrimination or special treatment.

Overall, it is important for a nonprofit to be explicit about the use of social media in their hiring process and to consider legal counsel when developing policies related to using these tools to recruit and hire employees.¹ Considering the growing popularity of social recruitment, as well as its promise, it's worth developing a robust and detailed strategy that specifically speaks to that area of your nonprofit's social media use.

Awareness Build with Job Boards

While many today would tout that networking is the best option for finding great talent, organizations find that online job boards can help them cast a wider net for their searches while also being helpful in targeting candidates in key functional areas or in different geographies.

Specialized sites, such as [Bridgespan.org's job board](http://bridgespan.org), [Idealist.org](http://idealists.org), and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy's Philanthropy Careers* promote open positions to individuals interested in nonprofit careers. Field-specific job boards, such as [HigherEdJobs.com](http://higheredjobs.com), which is geared towards work in higher education and [DevEx](http://devex.com), a leading global development job board, help focus your search on individuals within specific fields.

¹ For more on the legal aspects of using social media in the hiring process, see "Use Social Media for Recruiting, Screening, and Background Check?", <http://humanresources.about.com/od/selectemployees/qt/why-use-social-media-for-recruiting-and-screening.htm>, and "Update Your Recruitment and Selection Process with Social Media," <http://www.recruitingdivision.com/update-your-recruitment-and-selection-process-with-social-media/>.

Tap Networks to Find Diverse, Skilled Candidates

Affinity groups and professional networks serve a couple of purposes: They can help you home in on specific skills and roles that align with the work you're hiring for and they can help your organization ensure a level of diversity in your candidate pool. The key is to seek out the most appropriate network for your hiring needs. For example, if you're looking for a CFO, the Financial Executives Networking Group or other finance-related networks would be highly relevant.

Outside of tapping into groups with functional expertise, affinity groups and professional networks also can help you source diverse candidates. One mistake organizations often make is moving to the interview stage before getting a significant level of diversity in the pool. Your search committee should take the time to carefully think about channels it can target to recruit diverse candidates. Consider using local print and digital media that target specific neighborhoods, associations like [the Black Ivy Alumni League](#) or the [National Society of Hispanic MBAs](#), or conferences focused on a specific group or an issue relevant to the groups you wish to reach.

Conclusion

Organizations should constantly be on the lookout for new talent to help build their pipelines of potential candidates. An ongoing sourcing process will allow your organization to build relationships in communities you're likely to tap when a position opens and ultimately will result in expanding your resources for finding candidates overtime.

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