

Hiring a Bridger: Interview Guide

The key to success in any hiring process is finding the candidate with the right skills, interests, and qualities for your organization's needs, culture, and leadership. The candidate interview is an essential part of that process. In general, you should apply the same rules to conducting bridger interviews that you would to evaluating any candidate from the nonprofit sector. For example, interview questions should always cover the competency areas specific to the functional requirements of the position. However, when evaluating someone coming from the for-profit sector, it is also important to consider transferable experience and qualities that will allow the candidate to perform well in a nonprofit environment.

This guide is not meant to replace your existing interview process. Instead, it should supplement your current process by helping you develop questions specifically targeted at translating skills, experience, and qualities across sectors. Then you can determine whether a bridger candidate has demonstrated those abilities in the past, despite being in a different environment and/or function.

The guide provides competency areas, suggested interview questions, and key points to look for in candidate answers that will help you evaluate the candidate's ability to be a successful bridger.

In using this guide, expect to cover only a few of the competency areas during an interview. The guide is designed to be used throughout the interview process. During a first interview, Bridgestar recommends focusing on functional expertise and four other competency areas that you deem the most critical for success in your organization. As candidates progress through the interview process, use the guide to help structure your conversations and learn as much as possible about them. For finalist candidates, we strongly recommend that at least one of your interviews include a dinner or lunch meeting in a relaxed setting. Having the opportunity to meet outside of the office and get to know each other on a more personal basis may help to solidify your impressions of the candidate and provide information about him or her that will allow for a more thorough interview process.

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Transferable experience/qualities:

Competency Area	Sample Questions to Ask	What to Look for in Candidate Answers
Ability to manage teams, people, and organizations	<p>Have you managed diverse teams (individual team members in various functions and at different levels)?</p> <p>Are you committed to professional development of employees at all levels in the organization?</p>	<p>Examples that demonstrate the candidate's ability to manage a diverse staff with examples of goals that have been met by the team.</p> <p>History of working with entry-level, mid-management, and senior executives to accomplish goals.</p> <p>Candidate's ability to coach and mentor individuals throughout his/her career.</p> <p>A manager who uses positive motivators, as opposed to financial rewards or potential termination, to motivate staff.</p>
Ability to manage operations across functions	<p>What are your cross-functional project skills?</p> <p>Describe your project management methods.</p>	<p>Demonstrated success managing cross-functional projects.</p> <p>Systematic approach to project management; evidence that demonstrates the ability to multi-task.</p>
Ability to adapt as a manager	<p>What types of people have you worked with, influenced, and managed?</p> <p>What liaison roles have you played between functional areas (i.e. marketing and sales or information technology and product</p>	<p>Experience working with, influencing, and managing individuals with backgrounds different from the candidate's experience.</p> <p>Evidence of having served as a translator or a bridge between functional areas.</p>

	development)?	
Ability to lead	<p>What is your style with peer colleagues, direct reports, and/or fellow board members?</p> <p>Tell me how you approach problem-solving with peer colleagues and direct reports. (Examples?)</p> <p>What is your approach to recruiting, hiring, and coaching team members?</p>	<p>A style that will mesh with your senior managers, staff, and/or board.</p> <p>Positive problem-solving skills, collaborative approach to working with peer colleagues and direct reports.</p> <p>Fit with your organization's approach to recruiting, hiring, and coaching.</p>
Ability to influence/motivate others	<p>Have you accomplished goals via individuals outside of your direct staff?</p> <p>Does your style allow for influencing the organization?</p> <p>Have you managed a team within a nonprofit, perhaps on a board or in a volunteer capacity?</p>	<p>Concrete examples of having met goals that have required action from individuals who have not reported to the candidate; matrix management experience.</p> <p>Style fit that complements your senior managers and that will resonate with staff members.</p> <p>Solid experience managing teams as a volunteer in a nonprofit, ideally as a committee chair for a defined effort where influencing peers was necessary.</p>

<p>Ability to work with stakeholders</p>	<p>Have you worked with individuals and groups outside of your organization?</p> <p>Do you have any nonprofit volunteer experience that required working with stakeholders?</p> <p>Describe experience you have had working with nonprofit boards to address stakeholder concerns.</p>	<p>The depth and quality of the candidate's personal network.</p> <p>Solid experience influencing community stakeholder groups or, at minimum, experience developing strategies to meet stakeholder needs.</p> <p>A track record of productive nonprofit board service that has served stakeholder groups.</p>
<p>Ability to collaborate and resolve conflict</p>	<p>What is your ideal decision-making environment?</p> <p>What is your ideal relationship with your boss, colleagues, and direct report(s)?</p> <p>What is your approach to interpersonal conflict resolution?</p>	<p>Fit between candidate's ideal decision-making environment and that of your organization.</p> <p>Fit between candidate's ideal relationships and existing personalities/styles of team.</p> <p>Positive approaches to interpersonal conflict.</p>
<p>Ability to work in a resource- constrained environment</p>	<p>How would you feel about working in a cash-constrained environment?</p> <p>Have you ever had to modify your approach to a project because of limited resources?</p>	<p>Evidence that the candidate can work in cash-constrained nonprofit environment.</p> <p>Creative approaches that have allowed the candidate to manage projects despite lack of resources.</p>

<p>Ability to understand nonprofit sector</p>	<p>What are your general perceptions about the nonprofit sector?</p> <p>What do you expect to be the biggest challenges of working in the nonprofit sector?</p>	<p>Understanding of the diversity of the sector.</p> <p>Understanding that many executives new to the nonprofit sector find that they actually work longer hours than they did in the for-profit sector.</p>
<p>Ability to explain motivation for transition from the for-profit sector</p>	<p>What is your motivation for considering work in the nonprofit sector?</p> <p>When did you first start thinking about the transition?</p> <p>What are your short-versus long-term plans to be in the sector?</p>	<p>Rational, realistic thought process.</p> <p>Evidence of a thorough investigation of nonprofit sector work.</p> <p>Clarity regarding the candidate's intentions for working in the nonprofit sector and match with your expectations.</p>
<p>Ability to show commitment to organization's mission</p>	<p>Why are you interested in our organization?</p>	<p>Clearly articulated passion for and understanding of specific mission of your organization.</p>
<p>Ability to share organization's core values</p>	<p>How would you handle unethical actions or situations?</p> <p>Tell me about a long-term commitment you have had to an organization or cause.</p>	<p>Clarity about what is and isn't ethical behavior; courage to speak and act appropriately.</p> <p>Evidence of long-term involvement in a social sector organization or cause.</p>

<p>Ability to fit into organization's culture</p>	<p>Describe the organizational cultures in which you have worked.</p> <p>What is your understanding of our organization's culture (i.e. collaboration, decision making, delegation vs. hands-on)?</p> <p>How does our culture differ from your previous experience?</p>	<p>Candidate's ability to be successful in varied cultures.</p> <p>Clear understanding of organization's cultural nuances.</p> <p>Clear understanding of cultural difference between candidate's company and your organization.</p>
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Bridgestar (www.bridgestar.org), an initiative of the Bridgespan Group, provides a nonprofit management job board, content, and tools designed to help nonprofit organizations build strong leadership teams and individuals pursue career paths as nonprofit leaders.