

Nonprofit Careers: Tips for Moving Up in Your Organization

The mid-sized nonprofit where you work has just announced plans to create a new senior position in which you are interested. You have scrutinized the job specifications and you believe you are a good fit for the role. What are the main things you should do to boost your chances of getting the promotion?

1. **Be prepared.** Do not take it for granted that you will get the job just because you are an inside candidate. Prepare the same way you would if you were applying for a job with a new employer. Polish your résumé and prepare interview notes that explain in detail how your qualifications align with the job specifications.
2. **Interview for the position.** If the organization is not requiring internal candidates to interview, ask to go through the same interview process being required of external candidates. The extra level of scrutiny will give your candidacy added credibility.
3. **Make your case.** Be diligent about documenting your past successes at the organization so you can build a case for why you are qualified for the new job. Think through the details of each example of success and map out the context of the situation, the challenge, and how you contributed to finding a solution. Describe the relationships you had to leverage to address the challenge. Be sure to give credit to the other people in the organization who also contributed.
4. **Do not play politics.** Asking board members to put in a good word for you with the executive director can be counterproductive. An executive director who is trying to run an objective search is likely to resent political lobbying. Instead of asking favors from influential people, use objective criteria to show them why you are right for the job.

If, despite your best efforts, you do not get the promotion, try to be gracious. Schedule a meeting with your manager to get some objective feedback on why you did not get the job. By going through the interview process, you probably learned some things about yourself that you could use to set some professional development goals. Communicate those goals to your boss and discuss some ways you can attain them. In addition, try to think about ways you can help the incoming person be successful. The new person was hired because s/he had skills or experience you lack; look at working with this person as a learning opportunity.

Boston

535 Boylston St., 10th Floor
Boston, MA 02116
P 617 572-2833
F 617 572-2834

New York

3 Times Sq., 25th Floor
New York, NY 10036
P 646 562-8900
F 646 562-8901

San Francisco

465 California St., 11th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104
P 415 627-1100
F 415 627-4575

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.