

Hire well and hire once

A methodical process helps ensure recruiting success

If you want to be successful in recruiting and retaining new staffers, you must be methodical about the process. Preparing for the search and carefully following each hiring step are investments in your organization's future. Anything less than your best efforts can lead to poor decisions that waste time, money and energy.

Do your homework

Think seriously about the position you want to fill and analyze your reasons for needing another employee. Is a current staff member leaving? Did a grant proposal include a paid position? Is there a particular area of work that isn't getting done? Consider what your needs are today, how those needs will evolve, and how this position affects your budget for the short and long term.

Next, consider your alternatives. In a grant situation, you may not have this leeway. But if you're dealing with workload issues or an employee departure, you may have options other than making a new hire. Perhaps a consultant or contract worker can take care of an immediate need that doesn't have ongoing implications. Or are some of the tasks appropriate for volunteers to cover?

If you can find no workable alternatives, you're likely justified in pursuing a new hire. And, now that you're clear on what you need someone to do, you can write a focused, detailed job description with skills requirements.

Look in the right places

Your best source for job candidates is your own organization. Circulate the position opening among your board members and volunteers. Employees are also an excellent source of leads. They know your organization and are likely to recommend candidates who are skilled and, perhaps more important, a good cultural fit. Offer an incentive — such as a cash bonus or extra time off — if you hire someone a staffer recommends.

Other sources to consider include:

- Your organization's Web site, where you can target people who are already interested in your organization and its mission,
- Local college and university job placement centers, which generally serve both recent grads and alumni,
- Outside recruiters who specialize in nonprofits — particularly when you have a difficult or high-level position to fill, and
- Web sites that focus on nonprofit job postings, such as idealist.org, networkforgood.org or opportunityknocks.org.

Write precise job descriptions and minimum requirements for Web boards to prevent wading through dozens of resumés from unqualified candidates.

Execute with precision

When writing the job description, you need to clearly define the skills the person will need, in addition to the qualities that will make him or her a good fit in your environment — such as the willingness to help out in other areas or an ability to work well with minimal supervision. Determine which of these traits are “must haves” and which are simply “nice to haves.”

Use this list when you’re sorting through resumés. For example, don’t bring in someone for an interview if he or she falls short on three of your four “must haves.” And be sure everyone who interviews candidates uses the skills list and cultural fit criteria. This way, all of you will be assessing the prospective employee on the most important issues.

Be clear and honest with your candidates about cultural fit, painting an accurate picture of your nonprofit’s environment and what it takes to succeed in it. An otherwise skilled worker who can’t adapt to your organization’s style won’t last long. The best hiring process is one that minimizes surprises for both parties.

Investment in your future

Hiring is a time-consuming process. However, it’s an investment that will pay off over and over again when you find and hire the candidate who brings the right skills and attitude to your nonprofit.