



EXECUTIVE
SEARCH

How Nonprofit Executive Search is Changing, And What Your Organization Needs to Do Now

A recent Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants (AESC) survey reported CFO hunts took longer in 2016 than in 2015. And as the economy continues to improve, other executive positions will be affected as well. Today, candidates can be more selective, and nonprofits are finding their leadership positions left vacant for longer as a result.

The [growth of social enterprise](#) and purpose-driven business is also making it harder to compete for talented executives. Purpose-driven leaders who may have once seen the nonprofit sector as the only place to pursue a meaningful mission are now exploring new options in the private sector.

These changing dynamics are not only causing longer vacancies in nonprofit executive roles. They're also driving up leadership turnover. You've undoubtedly heard that turnover can cost an organization as much as double an individual's salary, and your nonprofit doesn't have that kind of money to burn. You have to get an executive search right the first time. Your organization must strengthen its search processes if you hope to hire an effective leader who aligns with your vision, culture and skill needs and can move your mission forward. Here are five changes you should consider making to your executive search process now to stay ahead of the curve.

Integrate technology and streamline processes

Search firms and organizations that conduct in-house leadership searches are investing more deeply in technology to access better talent and streamline their processes. If your nonprofit hopes to compete, you need to do the same. When you invest in tools for things like scheduling interviews, evaluating personality fit and managing candidate communication, you create efficiencies and open up more time for the most important part of the executive search process: interfacing with candidates to find the right fit.

Hire a firm that knows your industry

When the first major executive search firms came into existence 1960s, most search firms would work with any organization in any industry, as long as they had a budget.

Today, sub-sectors like technology, advertising, healthcare, publishing, and of course, the nonprofit sector can find an executive search firm that specializes in their specific industry. And industry knowledge comes with a bevy of benefits. The more a search firm works with organizations in your sector, the better they'll understand your specific needs, and the more connections they'll have with candidates who could be a fit for your open role.

Before you choose to partner with an executive search firm, be sure you ask the right questions to determine how well they truly understand the nonprofit sector generally and your mission specifically. They should be able to speak fluently about the competitive landscape for the role you're aiming to fill (including comparative compensation standards) and demonstrate a solid grasp of the competencies and traits required to succeed as a leader at your organization. They must also be comfortable with the concept of evaluating leaders based on the role they play in mission advancement and the realization of the goals established in your strategic plan.

While some nonprofits do choose to run their executive searches without the support of a search firm, keep in mind that forty-one percent of those surveyed by AESC said tenure was the most important metric of a successful candidate, and research shows candidates placed by executive search firms stayed in their roles longer.

Take advantage of the increased access to qualified passive candidates

Sites like LinkedIn provide organizations with greater access to individuals who could be a fit for open executive positions, but they only scratch the surface. Now, new tech platforms like ENGAGE, which uses predictive analytics to find passive candidates who are "likely to engage" with an organization during their executive search, are emerging. To ensure your organization remains truly competitive, you need to take advantage of tools like these and source candidates who are not actively looking to make a move.

Seek executive coaching in conjunction with your next executive search

A recent "Real World Leadership" study found that the development of leaders who can drive strategic change is a top priority for most organizations, but only 17 percent of executives surveyed indicated they were fully confident their organization had the leadership in place to drive that strategic change. That points to a problem in how organizations are filling their leadership positions. Executive search is about more than skills and experience; it's about finding candidates who are excited about and capable of advancing your organization's mission and goals and positioning them to succeed.

With that in mind, consider seeking an executive search partner that will continue to work with your organization even after your search has closed. Some executive search firms provide executive coaching for every leader they successfully place as a result of an executive search engagement. Look for a firm or partner that will focus its time on bringing new leaders up to speed on the nuances of your organization and their role in order to ensure a smooth transition both functionally and culturally. Even if you do not choose to work with an executive search firm on your next search, you should still consider providing leadership coaching to help your new executive step into their role successfully.



Vet for more than hard skills

There's more to a successful C-level candidate than the bullets on a CV. When vetting for leadership positions, the most forward-thinking organizations are focusing on soft skills, and yours should follow suit.

Tools like the PDA International Assessments can help you analyze candidates' behavioral profiles for competency and compatibility with your organization. They can also help you get a better read on hard-to-detect types of diversity like diversity of perspective and thought. That's especially important because, according to AESC's 2015 State of the Industry study, diversity is now a top business concern of organizations engaging in executive searches - a significant change in priority from just a few years earlier.

Many nonprofits are also incorporating job shadowing, role playing and behavioral interviews conducted by individuals at *all* levels into their executive search processes in order to improve their ability to assess soft skills and cultural fit.

While the dynamics that impact the executive search process will likely continue to change rapidly, taking steps like these can position your nonprofit competitively and help you attract and secure the leaders you need to advance your mission.

We'd love to know: what are you doing to evolve your nonprofit's approach to executive search and leadership? Email us at info@nonprofithr.com or find us on Twitter [@Nonprofit_HR](https://twitter.com/Nonprofit_HR) to start a conversation.





About Nonprofit HR

Nonprofit HR is the country's leading talent management firm that works exclusively with the nonprofit sector. Since 2000, we have amplified the impact of the world's most influential nonprofit organizations, from the YMCA to NeighborWorks America and ASAE.



We understand the unique needs of mission-driven organization like no one else, and as such, know that your organization is only as effective as your people. We partner with nonprofits and associations in talent acquisition, executive search, human resources consulting and knowledge & insights, all with the objective of making the nonprofit workforce the best it can be.

Nonprofit HR is also widely recognized for nonprofit sector research and thought leadership. We publish the leading [annual study](#) on nonprofit employment practices, and host a variety of [educational events](#) for nonprofit professionals.

If you're interested in learning more, [contact us](#) today.

About Myra T. Mathis

Myra serves as the lead search consultant on Nonprofit HR's search engagements and brings over 12 years of experience in executive search recruitment to Nonprofit HR.

Myra is a talented, results-driven international staffing and recruitment professional with a proven record. She's accomplished in planning and leading comprehensive recruiting strategies and teams in support of business goals and objectives. Myra has also effectively managed high-volume recruitment needs through substantive communication, organization and attention to detail. She has expertise in directing the creation of marketing tools and steering the execution of recruitment marketing programs.

Prior to joining Nonprofit HR, Myra was a Principal of a professional services firm where she supported small to large corporations including government agencies and nonprofits. She demonstrates solid strategic leadership skills and an ability to build and guide top-performing recruiting and training initiatives. She's adept at communicating with management, vendors, and internal departments to coordinate overall recruitment strategy.

Myra has worked with federal government and international development agencies, foundations and other nonprofits like USAID, Department of State, Share Our Strength (No Kid Hungry), Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, DoD, DoA, the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, OXFAM, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and many others.

