Human Resources Management Tools

Recruiting the Right People

NetGain
Partners Inc.

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Partners

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Recruiting the Right People

Having and keeping the right people on your team makes all the difference in running a productive and successful cultural organization.

Reflect for a moment on your own contribution to your organization's success. Your special talents – be they artistic or managerial – combined with your passion and commitment to the arts, probably played a significant role in getting your organization where it is today. Look at the contributions of others on your team. Chances are that some or all of them brought significant talent, energy and commitment to the table.

You can ensure and even accelerate the progress of your organization by continuing to attract top people. You can also avoid the pitfalls of bad hiring decisions, which can result in much wasted time and money, poor morale among the people you want to keep, and even lawsuits. In the following guidelines you'll learn the key factors in making successful hiring decisions:

1. Define your skill and talent requirements
2. Attract the right people
3. Select the best person

Step 1: Define Your Skill and Talent Requirements

Hiring, like all important management decisions, requires careful planning and knowing what you need. This means developing a "talent profile" whenever you are hiring to fill a position. Developing a talent profile will help you explain the job and your organization to applicants, serve as the basis for writing employment ads, and provide a tool for selecting the best people.

A talent profile is a "wish list" of the type of person you want for your team. It's not a job description by itself, but can be used to develop one. A talent profile is a tool that can help you decide whether to hire or bring in a temporary worker, figure out the best ways to recruit candidates, and help you screen candidates. Here are the points to consider as you develop your one-page talent profile:

- Don't delegate this work to someone else. You know best where your organization is headed and what kinds of people will help you get there.
- Always start by asking yourself whether this position is really needed. Is there some way to combine tasks or positions in a more effective way, and thereby free up financial resources for other uses?
- Think about people who are or have been successful in this particular role. If possible, talk to them about their work, what they like about it and why. Find out what skills they use most. Ask what they look for in their employer and co-workers.
- Consider what type of person will fit into your current work environment. Do you need someone who can work well in a team or operate on their own? Do you need someone who can work with difficult people?
- Think about your personal and team skill gaps. Can you find someone who will shore up *your* weaker skills or fill in any gaps?

Follow these steps to identify the expertise, experience, and other qualities you want in your new team members, whether they are permanent employees or temporary resources.

1. *Confirm that the work you'll assign to the new employee is critical to achieving the goals of your organization.* How will having someone do this work help you grow your audiences, mount better productions, raise more funding or market your cultural services? If your answer to this question is unclear, consider whether there's a way to combine tasks or positions more effectively.

2. *Define primary roles and responsibilities.* Develop a brief overview of the position, that is, a short paragraph that describes the primary role and the main responsibilities. Make this overview clear enough that applicants will understand what you're looking for and concise enough to communicate in a few minutes.

3. *Define the critical skills and characteristics required.* Create a comprehensive list of the skills and characteristics you want, then choose those most critical to your organization's needs. Include skills and qualities in whichever of the following areas are relevant to your organization and the job in question:

   - **Basic skills:** Word processing, Internet and e-mail, work planning, project management, etc.

   - **Specific job-related skills:** Fund-raising, marketing, volunteer management, production, patron service, finance/accounting, people management, etc.

   - **Technical skills:** production management, graphics development, database administration, etc.

   - **Interpersonal and communications skills:** Dealing with the public, attending functions, writing, coaching staff, making presentations, listening, influencing others, etc.

   - **Personal characteristics and values:** Interest in culture, flexibility, willingness to multi-task, motivated by factors other than income, initiative, high regard for others, team orientation, loyalty, etc. Remember that you're looking for a team member whose values and perspectives are a fit with your existing team.

4. *Identify preferred or required previous experience and achievement level.* What background experience do you expect the person to have in order to be a serious candidate for the position? Depending on your requirements and expectations, you may choose to differentiate between what you'd like and what you definitely need. If you expect the candidate to "hit the ground running", with little or no training from you, specify the kinds of experience and achievements that are must-haves.

5. *Define education and/or training required.* Include formal and informal education, technical training, etc. As with experience, you may choose to differentiate between what is preferred and what is required.

6. *Review and finalize your talent profile.* Review your profile to make sure you've identified all of the essential skills, experiences, and qualities you're looking for in the successful candidate. Summarize the most critical points in a one page talent profile.

Step 2: Attract the Right People

There is a lot of competition for really talented and committed workers in the cultural sector. You want not only to *be* a great place to work, but you want to *let people know* you are a great place to work. Take a look at your employee practices for retention, motivation, real involvement, accountability, reward, recognition, flexibility in work-life balance, and opportunity to learn and grow. These are your key areas for becoming an employer of choice in the cultural community. You want your employees to spread the word that your organization is a one of the best and most satisfying cultural organizations in which to work.

Obviously every cultural organization wants to attract and hire the best possible people. But finding the right candidates can be expensive and time consuming. One of the biggest challenges is deciding where to look. Whether you're hiring a full-time or part-time employee, there are many sources of candidates available to you. Where you look for new people will determine the quality and quantity of applicants available to you. Let's look at where to look and how to communicate what you're looking for.

Follow these steps to find candidates that meet your requirements:

1. *Confirm how you will fill the position.* Will you hire a full-time employee or a part-time employee? Does it call for a temporary worker? Is it a temporary, seasonal position? Would you consider bringing in a student intern or volunteer to meet the need?

2. *Select up to three of the following recruiting resources to help you search for candidates.* You can be most effective in your talent search if you choose a mix of two or three recruiting methods.

   - **Your personal and professional network**

     If, for example, you're hiring a full-time Director of Development, you will want to actively seek out recommendations from your contacts in the cultural and other non-profit sectors.

     If you have a strong network, you may be able to use it to recruit for almost any skill set you need. The more people you tell about your opportunities, the more likely you are to attract a pool of top-notch candidates from which to choose.

- **Professional and arts services organizations**

  Almost certainly you should advertise on job boards on the most appropriate cultural and non-profit websites. On the other hand, in a more junior position where the right individual may not be Internet-savvy or have regular access to a computer, you may decide to advertise in arts or other publications.

- **Colleges, universities, and technical schools**

  All educational institutions have job placement services to help their graduates find employment.

- **Employment agencies**

  Using an agency can save you a lot of time in generating candidates *if they specialize in the non-profit world*. But a major drawback for cash-strapped cultural organizations is the (usually substantial) fees involved.

  Some agencies fill a wide variety of positions while others specialize in certain types of jobs. Some supply only temporary workers while others recruit for full-time and part-time employees. You can use these agencies to recruit almost any type of employee you need but make sure you understand their policies and fees. If you can afford to go this route, look for an agency that has a reputation for providing high-quality candidates, and ideally has a track record in the cultural community.

- **Public (government-operated) employment agencies**

  Government job posting boards can be a good source of candidates for administrative, clerical, production, and seasonal positions.

- **Online recruiting**

  One of the fastest growing tools for bringing together prospective employers and job seekers is the Internet. As indicated above, online recruiting tends to work best when you're trying to attract professionals who are experienced in using the Internet. This approach can save you a lot of time and money. The key is finding the online recruiting resource – usually a job board dedicated to non-profit sector positions - that has the best access to your ideal candidates.

- **Mainstream media advertising**

  The most popular and traditional method of recruiting is print ads, using local, regional, and national newspapers to attract talent. You can use media advertising to recruit almost any type of employee.

3. *Prepare your job posting according to the following criteria:*

- Appropriate to the recruiting method you choose. You may need more than one job posting, formatted for different recruiting methods.

- Clearly describes the primary role and responsibilities of the position. Paint an accurate picture of the job and your organization. Create realistic expectations.

- Clearly describes the critical skills and characteristics of the candidate you're seeking. Don't say a particular skill is "essential" if it isn't!

- Includes required education and training.

- Includes required previous job experience, as applicable.

- Presents an appealing and accurate representation of your organization. Think about what kind of description will create interest in your organization and job opening. Be sure to include something unique about your organization.

- Make sure you do not include references to gender, age or any other discriminatory factor.

Step 3: Select the Best Person

The final and most challenging step in attracting top talent is selecting the best person for the job. These guidelines will help you in screening and interviewing candidates, checking references, and making your final selection.

Screen Candidates

1. *Involve Your Employees in the Hiring Process.* You have three opportunities to involve your employees in the hiring process. They can recommend excellent candidates to your organization. They can help you review resumes and qualifications of potential candidates. They can help you interview people to assess their potential "fit" with your current team. Organizations that fail to use employees to assess potential employees are underutilizing one of their most important assets. People who participate in the selection process are committed to helping the new employee succeed. It can't get any better than that for you and the new employee.

2. *Evaluate candidates against your talent profile.* Review the talent profile you created when you started the hiring process, then evaluate the resumes and applications of your top candidates.

   Identify the candidates you'd like to consider further. Include those candidates whose applications and resumes indicate the following:

   - The candidate appears to have the skills, work experience, and education/ training you specified in your talent profile.
   - The candidate appears to have been successful or made a real difference in previous jobs.
   - The dates of employment suggest stability and a commitment to either the cultural sector or their chosen type of work.

3. *Screen potential candidates by phone to determine your top choices.* Telephone interviews can save you a lot of time and help you learn more about the background and achievements of your top candidates. Eliminate candidates you can't reach, who don't return your calls, or with whom you don't feel any rapport.

Tips for Screening Candidates Over the Phone

- Call applicants when you will not be interrupted.
- Open the conversation by asking candidates how they heard about the job or how they know the person who referred them.
- Explain the basic job requirements and ask the candidate how they think it fits with their background and aspirations.
- Ask them what their interests are in cultural activities, why they've chosen to work (or look for work) in the cultural sector.
- Take careful notes.
- Ask everyone the same questions so you can make clear comparisons.
- Don't promise candidates a formal job interview unless you really mean it.
- Explain what's next in the selection process and how a final selection will be made.

INTERVIEW CANDIDATES

Interview top candidates face-to-face using a systematic process. Your interview process should include the following:

- A warm welcome to the candidate
- A review of what you want to accomplish during the interview
- A description of the job opportunity and your organization
- Time for you to gather information from the candidate by asking open-ended or problem-solving questions
- An opportunity for the candidate to ask questions
- A clear statement of the next steps in your hiring process
- A positive closing.

Tips for Face-to-Face Interviewing

- Be explicit about your goals, the job requirements, the hiring process, and your desire to find a good fit for the job.
- Be friendly and relaxed as you review the candidate's work history, then lead to deeper questions about their accomplishments and past performance.
- Be conversational, but probe beyond generalizations.
- Make sure all questions are relevant to the position.
- Don't dominate or rush the conversation. Listen with intent, as demonstrated by your questions, your responses, and your body language.
- If you plan to have one or two other individuals in the meeting, plan your roles in advance, including who will ask what questions. Make sure you explain to the candidate why the other people are there.

Questions to Ask During Interviews

There are different ways to pose questions during the face-to-face interview to get the information you need. We will focus on two alternative approaches. Both can be very effective. You choose the one with which you are most comfortable.

The two approaches are:

- ► The traditional interview
- ► The behaviour-based interview

The Traditional Interview

The traditional interview consists of asking straightforward questions where the purpose of the question is quite clear. Always try to phrase these as "open-ended" questions that require candidates to enlarge and explain, rather than "closed-ended" questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no and give you very little information.

Examples of open-ended questions:

- ► **Job or work interests:**
  - How did you find out about this job?
  - Why are you interested in this position?
  - What are your interests in arts and cultural activities?
  - What do you know about our organization?
  - How does this job fit in to your long-term career plans?
- ► **Work experience:**
  - Tell me about your last job.
  - What is it that you actually did in your last job?
  - What improvements did you make on the job?
  - What results can you take credit for and how did you accomplish them?
  - How do you work with colleagues? With staff who report to you (*if applicable*)?
  - How would you describe the type of working relationship you like to have with your boss?
  - What did you enjoy most and least about your last job?

- **Skills:**
  - How skilled would you say you are in doing the work I've described? What kind of training or support do you think you'd need to get up to speed?
  - Can you tell me how you've applied these skills in previous jobs?

The Behaviour-based Interview

Many organizations are increasingly using the behaviour-based interview approach. They use a candidate's previous behaviour to indicate their future performance. Depending on the responsibilities of the position and the working conditions, a candidate may be asked to describe a situation that required problem solving skills, flexibility, leadership, conflict resolution, multi-tasking, initiative or stress management. The interviewer wants to know how the candidate handled these types of situations.

Appendix I gives examples of questions you can use in a behaviour-based interview.

There are several types of behavioural or combination interviews.

- Structured interview with layered questions: Skilled interviewers commonly use this. They ask a series of behavioural questions and non-behavioural questions. The questions often overlap and are designed to gather information about each of the employer's major issues.

- Informal interview: This type is casual and relaxed. It's intended to get the candidate talking and friendly. The candidate may reveal more information than they might otherwise. This may enable you to eliminate individuals from the candidate pool at an early stage, or to confirm that a candidate is particularly well-qualified.

- Assessment Instruments/Testing: Various types of tests are used to determine if a candidate is a good fit for the organization. Available tests include personality inventories to assess personality types, aptitude inventories to assess aptitudes in certain skill areas, and interest inventories to assess interests in various occupational areas. Combination instruments can be a mix of any of these.

These tests can be useful – although their effectiveness as a predictor of future success is much-debated – but can also be fairly expensive to buy and to have interpreted. Hence they tend not to be used often in cultural organizations.

- Combination interview: This type of interview combines two or more types of interviews. This could occur within the same interview, on subsequent interviews, or both.

Follow-up Interviews

Organizations usually bring candidates back for second and sometimes third or fourth follow-up interviews. There are a number of reasons for this. Sometimes they just want to confirm that they have found the ideal (or best) candidate. Sometimes they're having a difficult time deciding between a short-list of candidates. Other times, usually for more senior positions, other stakeholders in the organization want to get a better sense of who the candidate is before a hiring decision is made.

Additional interviews may go in a variety of directions. When meeting with the same interviewer, a candidate might focus on cementing rapport, understanding where the organization is going and how their skills mesh with the organization's vision and internal culture. Candidates may find themselves negotiating a compensation package. Or they may find themselves starting from scratch with an interviewer they haven't met before.

As a rule of thumb, if you find you're asking someone back for more than two or three interviews, it's very possible that you are not as sure as you thought you were about what you want or need in a candidate. This can be a waste of time and resources for both you and the candidate.

Interviews are time consuming and a systematic, disciplined approach is needed to do them well. They are a flexible method for assessing and selecting candidates for all levels and types of positions. They generate data, which the interviewer can then analyze to generate information about whether a candidate is a good fit for the organization. However, information from different interviews is potentially difficult to manage. It has these characteristics:

- Hard to bring together coherently
- Open to potential interviewer bias

- May miss certain areas of knowledge, skills, and ability
- May stress one area and neglect others
- There are all kinds of potential problems in the interpretation and analysis of the information obtained.

It's very important that you choose the interviewing style and format that are best suited to the needs of both your organization and its potential employees. By doing that you'll build team strength and get the right people in the right seats, ready to move ahead.

CHECK REFERENCES

Reference-checking is one of the most important steps in the whole recruitment process, and yet it is often bypassed by hiring managers. It is critically important because track record is probably the most valuable indicator of future success. You need to be sure that the people you hire can do the job, contribute to your organization's growth and development, and have no "skeletons in the cupboard" that might endanger the positive atmosphere that you are building and maintaining in your workplace.

Ask the candidate to give you at least two work-related references that you can call to discuss their experience of working with the candidate. Ideally these should be people to whom they reported in previous jobs. If they can't give a previous boss who will act as a reference for them, you would be well-advised to find out why.

Tips for Conducting Reference Checks

- ► If possible, have candidates ask their references to call you. The reference will be much more willing to share information with you if he or she was asked by the candidate and has taken the time to call you.

- ► Keep your questions focused on what you need to know about the candidate's performance in previous jobs. Keep your questions consistent from reference to reference so you can compare their responses.

- ► Some good questions for references include:
    - How long have you known ___?
    - What was your reporting relationship to him/her?
    - How would you describe his/her contributions to your organization?
    - None of us is perfect – we all have our strengths and weaknesses. How would you describe _____'s strengths? And skills that he/she could further develop?
    - How does he/she get along with others, both internally and with external contacts?
    - What motivates him/her?
    - Would you re-hire him/her?
    - (If for a management position) How would you describe his/her management style?
    - Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Make Your Final Selection

If you're fortunate and still have a shortlist of two or three excellent candidates, you may have to conduct one final round of interviews and carefully evaluate their accomplishments and skills one last time before making your decision. As far as possible, make sure your top choice will fit into the internal culture of your organization.

You're then ready to make your written offer – Appendix II shows an example of a typical offer letter that you can adapt to your needs.

A final tip

Trust your instincts

Poor "chemistry" between a new addition to your team and your existing team (including yourself) sabotages the success of new hires more often than anything else – including incompetence.

If you sense an even slightly negative quality, a concern that "just won't go away", think very hard before hiring that individual. When you are particularly keen to get the hiring process completed and the job filled, the temptation can be great to hire an individual (the best of the bunch) even if you are concerned about their "fit" in the organization. In a worryingly large percentage of those cases, your instincts turn out to have been right – but too late. You are left with damage control, a possibly demoralized staff, probably a termination, possibly a financial pay-out, and another time-consuming hiring project.

The questions and behavioural characteristics listed below are by no means comprehensive. But they are good starter questions to get you going with the behaviour-based interview approach.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Initiative and Follow-through:

1. Give me an example of a situation where you had to overcome major obstacles to achieve your goals.
2. Tell me about a goal that you set that took a long time to achieve or that you are still working towards.
3. Tell me about a time when you won (or lost) an important donor.
4. Tell me about a time when you used your political savvy to push a project through that you really believed in.
5. Tell me about a situation that you had significant impact on because of your persistence and follow-through.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Thinking and Problem Solving:

1. Tell me about a time when you had to analyze facts quickly, grasp the key issues, and respond quickly.
2. If you had to do that activity over again, how would you do it differently?
3. Describe for me a situation where you may have missed an obvious solution to a problem.
4. Tell me about a time when you anticipated potential problems and took preventative measures that avoided a major problem.
5. Tell me about a time when you overcame a major obstacle.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Communication:

1. Tell me about a time when you had to present a proposal to decision-makers in an organization and were able to do it successfully.
2. Tell me about a situation where you had to sell your idea to a superior or to a Board.
3. Describe for me a situation where you persuaded team members to do things your way. What was the effect?
4. Tell me about a time when you were tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Working Effectively with Others:

1. Give me an example that shows you've been able to develop and maintain good working relationships with other people, even though you had differing points of view.
2. Tell me about a time when you were able to motivate people to get the best out of them.
3. Tell me about a difficult situation you had with a co-worker, and how you handled it.
4. Tell me about a time when you played an integral role in getting a team (or work group) back on track.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Work Quality:

1. Tell me about a time when you ran a fund-raising event that was well received. Why was it successful?
2. Tell me about a time when you wrote a report that was not well received. What happened?
3. Tell me about a specific time you were involved in improving the way things were done in your organization. What was your role? What was the outcome?
4. Tell me about a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Creativity and Innovation:

1. Tell me about a situation in which you were able to find a new and better way of doing something that really mattered to your organization.
2. Tell me about a time when you were creative in solving a problem.
3. Describe a time when you were able to come up with new ideas that were key to the success of some activity or project.
4. Tell me about a time when you had to bring out the creativity in others.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Leadership:

1. Tell me about a time when you accomplished something significant that wouldn't have happened if you had not been there to make it happen.
2. Tell me about a time when you were able to step into a situation, take charge, muster support and get good results.
3. Describe for me a time when you may have been disappointed in your own behaviour. What have you done differently since then?
4. Tell me about a time when you had to discipline or fire a friend.
5. Tell me about a time when you’ve had to develop leaders under you.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Priority Setting:

1. Tell me about a time when you had to balance competing priorities and did so successfully.
2. Tell me about a time when you had to pick out the most important things in some activity and make sure those got done.
3. Tell me about a time that you prioritized the elements of a complicated project.
4. Tell me about a time when you got bogged down in the details of a project.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Decision Making:

1. Describe for me a time when you had to make an important decision with limited facts.
2. Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
3. Describe for me a time when you had to adapt to a difficult situation. What did you do?
4. Tell me about a time when you made a bad decision.
5. Tell me about a time when you hired (or fired) the wrong person.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Ability to Work in Varying Work Conditions (stress, changing deadlines, etc.):

1. Tell me about a time when you worked effectively under pressure.
2. Tell me about a time when you were unable to complete a project on time.
3. Tell me about a time when you had to change work mid-stream because of changing priorities.
4. Describe for me how you handle stressful situations.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Delegation:

1. Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
2. Tell me about a time when you did a poor job of delegating.
3. Describe for me a time when you had to delegate to a person with a full workload, and how you went about doing it.

If You're Looking For Behaviours that Revolve Around Serving Patrons:

1. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an irate patron.
2. Tell me about one or two patron-service related programs that you've done that you're particularly proud of.
3. Tell me about a time when you made a lasting, positive impression on a patron.

[Name]
[Address]

[Date]

Dear *[Name]:*

I am pleased to offer you the position of *[title]* of *[organization]*. The terms and conditions of your employment are as follows:

1. Your employment with us will start on *[date]*.

2. Your responsibilities include those normally associated with this position in a *[type of organization – e.g. theatre, opera company, museum, etc.]* including, but not limited to *[brief description of major responsibilities]* and other appropriate duties that may be assigned from time to time.

3. You annual salary will be $*[amount]* and will be paid in *[weekly, bi-weekly or monthly]* installments. *[Organization]* will make all source deductions and payments on your behalf.

4. Your initial three months of employment will be probationary during which time either party may terminate this agreement without notice. You will receive a performance review after 60 days and thereafter on an annual basis. Assuming a successful completion of probation, resignation will require *[number]* weeks notice.

5. Our vacation policy provides you with *[number]* weeks paid holiday per year at such time is mutually agreed, as well as all statutory holidays. If you are required to work on any statutory holiday, you will be provided time in lieu at a mutually agreed opportunity.

6. You will report directly to the *[title]* and work closely with *[if applicable, the major co-workers or external contacts]*.

7. It is acknowledged that your employment with *[organization]* is full-time in nature and that any other work outside the purview of *[organization]* must be pre-approved by the General Manager.

9. It is acknowledged that you are a representative of *[organization]* at all times and that all information pertaining to *[organization]* and its employees will remain strictly confidential.

10. It is acknowledged that this agreement contains a number of clauses and words with indeterminate definitions and that both parties will proceed at all times with good will in the execution of this agreement.

11. *[Organization]* is committed to employment equity and requires that all staff in positions follow a policy of employment equity as detailed in *[local legislation]* and adopted by *[organization].*

We are very excited about our future plans for *[organization]* and at the prospect of working with you. If you are in agreement with the terms and conditions outlined in this letter, please sign below to signify your acceptance.

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Title]

I have read and understand the foregoing and agree to all terms and conditions.

_____ _____

[Name] *[Date]*