

Is There a Search in Your Future?

If you anticipate a search for a key role in your school, the steps you take NOW will greatly impact its success. Ample preparation is particularly important given the intensely competitive landscape in which faith-based organizations find themselves.

In a perfect world, succession planning would be so firmly in place that searches would not be required. When last we checked, it wasn't a perfect world. Many schools are simply too small, or budgets too tight, to have an heir apparent on staff. If this is your reality, pre-planning your search is even more vital.

The goal of a search is to not only find the ideal candidate but also launch that person in the role and establish a foundation for the person's success. Such an orientation should inform all elements of the search process.



Step I – Position Clarity

Having updated and accurate materials as cited here, and answers to the questions below, will ensure you are ready to launch your search.

Position title and job description

Candidate criteria

Job descriptions of direct reports

Organizational chart

Salary and benefits package

Reason for position opening

Candidate selection/approval process

What are the top priorities for this position in the next three years?

What challenges and opportunities exist for the organization?

What qualifications, experience, skills, etc., should be sought in the ideal candidate?

What makes this position, and the organization, appealing?

Step II – Search Committee

Your search committee has multiple responsibilities, which should guide who is chosen to participate:

Contribute to and Review Position Profile

Develop Publicity Strategy

Network and Extend Profile

Review Application Materials

Attend All Interviews

Interview Candidates and Deliberate

Recommend Candidate(s) to Hiring Official

Maintain Objectivity and Confidentiality

Particularly important among these are the ability and willingness to promote the search extensively to their personal and professional networks. The best candidates are often not seeking a new job, but when personally contacted by a colleague, friend or relative, give it serious consideration. It is also essential that each member of the committee understands and commits to maintaining the confidentiality of the search at each step of the process. Candidates have grown increasingly sensitive to privacy regarding search over the past few years.

The search committee should represent each of the areas within the organization that fall under the position's responsibility. Ideally, direct reports to the position do not sit on the search committee. Individuals who can represent multiple constituencies will enable you to achieve representation without needing an overly large committee.

It is very helpful if everyone on the search committee has flexibility in scheduling. If interviews can only be conducted in the evening, the process will take much longer. Likewise, the candidates need availability. Once you've identified finalists, you want to move fast. If you're interested in specific candidates, the likelihood is they are being pursued by other schools as well. Search committee members who relocate for parts of the year, have excessive travel schedules, or simply too many demands on their time, may not be able to prioritize your search.

Many first interviews are conducted via video conference. Be sure each member of the committee is comfortable and capable of managing the technology so that the interview process isn't hijacked by "we can't hear you" and "you need to unmute."

Step III – Position Profile

The days of posting a job description on National Catholic Educational Association and awaiting an avalanche of resumes are over. Given the competitive landscape for jobs, attracting candidates requires aggressively marketing the positions in such a way that the opportunity is compelling and interesting. Your position profile should describe not only what you seek in candidates but also what they can find in your school and the role. Photos, fast facts, information about the community in which you dwell and where you serve, testimonials, organizational strengths, mission, vision, values – all should give potential candidates a good sense of the organization and enable them to see themselves in the role. You can see samples of profiles at <https://www.cbsservices.org/current-csm-admin-searches.html>.

Be sure to clarify the strengths of your school. Upper level position candidates will likely want insight into...

- Enrollment** - trends over the past five years
- Finances** - tuition, aid, philanthropy, debt, reserves, endowment
- Tenure** - of positions that most regularly interact with that of the role advertised
- Board** - type and efficacy

The profile should also include your application requirements, process and deadline. Typical materials include letter of introduction, resume, references, and a written response to a provided essay topic or question relevant to the position's priorities.

With the position profile written, designed and ready to post, and the other steps covered, you are well on your way to a successful search.

The collage displays four pages from a search profile for De La Salle Institute.
 - Page 1 (top left) features a large portrait of a man, a photo of the school's campus and stadium, and the text 'De La Salle Institute Chicago, Illinois President Search'. It includes a 'Qualifications' section with bullet points and a 'Salary / Benefits' section.
 - Page 2 (top right) shows a 'Mission Statement' and a 'Chicago Tradition' section.
 - Page 3 (bottom left) contains 'Fast Facts' with icons for 38 years of service, 100% of graduates attending college, and 16 Catholic schools. It also includes a 'Role of the President' section.
 - Page 4 (bottom right) features a 'Class of 2021' photo, a 'Always Growing' section, and a 'Catholic Tradition' section.
 The entire collage is set against an orange background with numbered markers 1, 2, 3, and 4.

What Else?

Oh, little things – advertising and outreach; application vetting; interview prep/search committee orientation; interviews – screening, reference, search committee; finalist interviews; approval process; announcement/communication plan; visit day; onboarding; etc.

A comprehensive search covers a lot of ground – and more than we can describe here. Start with these first three steps – as far in advance as possible – and you will find that the rest will flow much more smoothly on your path to LAUNCH the ideal candidate. ☀️

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