



Best-Practice Guidelines for Hiring an Interim Executive Director (ED)

The Position Announcement:

- A simple announcement outlining the most important responsibilities of the position is sufficient.
- Generally, an interim ED will have the same day-to-day responsibilities as a long-term ED, with these exceptions:
 - Your interim ED will also be responsible for:
 - conducting an organizational assessment
 - implementing a transition plan that puts the organization in the strongest possible position to attract exemplary candidates for the long-term ED position
 - working with your search committee to ensure an effective hiring and orientation process for your incoming leader
 - Unless specifically agreed to in advance, your interim ED will not be responsible for:
 - long-term strategic planning
 - implementation of long-term strategic goals that are not already in motion
 - long-term strategic fundraising
 - acting as an executive search consultant
- It's important to make it clear in your announcement that the person hired must commit NOT to be a candidate for the long-term ED position.
- DO ask for a resume and a brief, thoughtful email expressing interest.
- DON'T ask for a full cover letter. Please remember that interim ED work is temporary work, and that professional interim EDs must apply for interim jobs again and again.

Getting the Word Out:

- Email your position announcement to the Interim Executive Network (IEN) at interimexecnetwork@gmail.com. We'll quickly disseminate it to our network of experienced interim EDs.
- If the search is confidential, please let us know. We'll work with your representative to make sure our members know to be discreet.
- If the search is public, the announcement can also be distributed through your organization's nonprofit networks.

- Some organizations may also wish to post the announcement on a nonprofit job board, such as Idealist.org.

Vetting the Candidates:

- After reviewing the resumes, you'll likely decide on a small number of individuals to speak with. Please remember that you are hiring for a temporary position. In addition to tackling one or more interim positions annually, professional interim EDs communicate with nonprofit organizations about potential interim positions on an ongoing basis. Be respectful of candidates' time.
- Limit the process to one formal "interview" – and plan for this to be a two-way conversation. Any experienced interim ED will have important questions for you too.
- If you have follow-up questions for candidates, these can be handled in a phone call or email exchange.
- It's fine to check references on your top candidate. Experienced interim EDs will be able to put you in touch with representatives of organizations they have served previously.

Suggested Topics for Conversations with Candidates:

- Ask the candidate to describe how being an interim ED is different from being a long-term ED.
- Ask the candidate to describe their three top focus areas when serving as an interim.
- Ask the candidate to describe how they typically spend their first week and their first month as an interim.
- Ask the candidate to describe a difficult decision they had to make as an interim.
- Ask the candidate what they will need from board and staff in order to be successful.
- The interview is a confidential, two-way conversation, so:
 - Describe any major issues that may make your organization's leadership transition complex and ask how the candidate might address them.
 - Share any financial or fundraising challenges the organization is facing, so there are no major surprises on the first day of employment, and the candidate is able to make an informed decision about taking on the position.
- Confirm that the interviewee is committed not to be a candidate for the long-term ED position.

Timeline Issues:

- **Starting Early:** If your ED is retiring or has accepted another job – or even if the board is planning to terminate the ED – it's helpful to conduct the search for an interim ED before the previous ED departs. IEN can help you to keep your search confidential, as appropriate.
- **Starting Late:** Sometimes an ED leaves or is fired abruptly, and there isn't time to plan in advance. In other instances, boards only learn about the possibility of hiring a professional

interim ED after the former leader's departure. No worries! It's fine to contact IEN and start the process of hiring an interim at that point.

- **Chicken-and-Egg Issues:** The first step should be to hire your interim ED. Your organization will benefit greatly from this individual's experience and knowledge. It's best to wait even to start your search for your next long-term ED until your interim ED is in place and up to speed. There really is no rush! Your interim ED will help board and staff to thoroughly assess the organization's strengths, weaknesses, and particular needs for future leadership – as well as supporting you in the process of finding your next long-term ED. This includes helping your search committee to develop an accurate job description for the new leader. Your organization will emerge stronger at the end of the leadership transition if these steps are taken thoughtfully and sequentially.
- **Length of the Transition:** The transition period during which an organization is led by an interim ED can vary, depending on its specific needs and circumstances. Generally speaking, though, you can expect an interim engagement to last roughly six to twelve months. This is normal! A leadership transition is a time of great opportunity and potential for healthy change. Keep the length of time fluid and expect the interim ED to help you decide when the right time comes to begin the search for your next long-term leader.

Negotiating the Particulars of an Interim Engagement:

- It is a "best practice" for your interim ED to be a (temporary) employee of your organization. Expect to sign an employment agreement with your top candidate before the interim period begins.
- Some professional interims are only available for full-time work, while others prefer part-time. Consider the needs of your organization and expect to negotiate about this, especially in light of differences between the functions of long-term EDs versus interim EDs.
- The members of the Interim Executive Network are all highly experienced nonprofit professionals who expect to be paid market-rate salaries. As you enter negotiations with an interim ED, consider whether the salary you have paid previously has kept up with the nonprofit market.
- Another factor to consider is that many interim EDs will not take advantage of your organization's health or retirement plans. When negotiating, please remember that this is a significant savings to your organization.
- Interim EDs should be eligible to accrue and utilize vacation and sick leave at the same rate as your other employees. However, it shouldn't be necessary to pay out any un-utilized leave time when your interim departs. This can be spelled out in your employment agreement.

To Contact the Interim Executive Network:

- Visit our website at <https://interimnonprofitexecs.com/>
- Email us at interimexecnetwork@gmail.com