

## Configuring the Interview Process: A Recruiting Caselet

While every executive search is unique, our recruiting caselets series describes several common scenarios that crop up during the search process.

A Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit planned to hire an executive director (ED). It would be the \$1.7 million organization's first executive search, so an interview process had to be created from scratch. One of the new ED's most important responsibilities would be to cultivate strong relationships with external stakeholders. So, uncovering that quality in the applicants was a top goal of the interview process. "We needed to see how they presented themselves and how they acted under pressure," said Karen DeMay, Bridgestar's regional director of talent and recruiting, who helped the organization's search committee craft the search.

The interview process was planned to include three stages, but wound up having four. For the first step, job candidates came in for a panel interview with the five members of the search committee. Although group interviews are generally unpopular with job candidates because they are so stressful, the meetings allowed the committee to see how well each applicant could think on his or her feet in front of an audience. One applicant won the support of the full committee and several others won the recommendation of most, but not all, of the committee members. Since the committee wanted complete consensus on all the candidates it moved to the next round, these latter candidates were asked to come in for a second interview. In this second interview, candidates met for coffee with just one or two search committee members. The goal of these meetings was to see the candidates in a less formal, more relaxed setting and to give the candidates a better sense of the organization.

At this point, DeMay did preliminary reference checks on all the candidates who were moving on to a third interview. In the third interview, the candidates met with staff members with whom they would be working. Full reference reports were prepared on the two candidates who remained in the running after the third-round interviews. For the fourth and final interview, the two finalists were required to make a formal PowerPoint presentation to the full search committee mapping out their first 12 months as ED of the organization. This was followed by a question and answer session. The chosen finalist later made the same PowerPoint presentation to the board. After a full background check was performed on the candidate, the board gave formal approval for the hire.

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“The rigor of the process allowed the search committee to gain a deep understanding of the finalist candidate—and vice versa—and they were able to confidently make a recommendation to the board,” said DeMay. “Everyone is extremely happy with the new ED.”

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