

Hiring an Executive Director During a Difficult Time of Year

A Bridgestar Success Story

How does a search for an executive director (ED) launched during a traditionally difficult time of year for recruiting reap good candidates? The key, as the board of the Massachusetts Biotechnology Education Foundation and its then chairwoman, Judy Ozbun, discovered, is to do your homework first.

In July 2006, Ozbun and the foundation's board needed to hire its first ED to establish greater autonomy vis-à-vis its parent organization, the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council. However, starting the search in early July seemed a near impossible task, as Ozbun was warned by a number of people. "A lot of people told me, 'You're not going to be able to find anyone at that time of year,'" she recalled.

But the board, determined to make the hire quickly, set about creating a job description. The foundation needed someone with a strong finance background, so the board reviewed articles about hiring nonprofit chief financial officers (CFOs) and pulled requirements from sample CFO job descriptions. It also compiled the required skills for the new ED and drafted a set of strategic, five-year goals for the organization, deciding which parts the ED would own. "All of this allowed us to create a succinct, but very effective job specification," said Ozbun. Further research helped the board establish a process and a timetable for the rest of the recruiting process, including interviews, reference checks, and extending an offer.

The foundation received 60 applications in response to its job posting. "That was a phenomenal response," Ozbun said. By late August the foundation had hired its new ED, Lance Hartford, who, according to Ozbun, was "exactly the right candidate." Hartford possessed all three key skill sets the board had identified: 1) a strong financial background; 2) experience working through a transition at another organization; and 3) a proactive and forward-thinking approach.

Ozbun attributes the board's success in hiring Hartford during a traditionally difficult time of year to the organization's ability to stay focused and use myriad resources to aid its search. "We didn't listen to the naysayers," Ozbun said. "We did a lot of research—we did our homework. And if you do all that, you will find your candidate."

Resources on Bridgestar's website (www.bridgestar.org) figured prominently in the search by the board of the Massachusetts Biotechnology Education Foundation for its first executive director, according to former board chairwoman Judy Ozbun. Here are some of the resources the board used:

1. [Hiring Toolkit: Navigating the Hiring Process](#). "The Hiring Toolkit was phenomenal. It was so great to have a guide that broke out what to do and in what order," Ozbun said.
2. [Sample CFO Job Descriptions](#). "We didn't have a lot of time to do this and we needed someone with a skill set different from everyone else on the staff, someone with a strong finance background," Ozbun said.
3. [Hiring a CFO: Interview Guide](#). "All the skill sets [we listed in the job description] were elements we pulled from the Hiring Toolkit, the sample job descriptions, and this article," Ozbun said.

Boston

535 Boylston St., 10th Floor
Boston, MA 02116
P 617 572-2833
F 617 572-2834

New York

3 Times Sq., 25th Floor
New York, NY 10036
P 646 562-8900
F 646 562-8901

San Francisco

465 California St., 11th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104
P 415 627-1100
F 415 627-4575

4. [The Bridgestar Job Board](#). “We posted the job on Bridgestar and got 60 applications from there and other sources. That was a phenomenal response,” Ozbun said.
5. [Featured Job Description](#). See the job description Judy Ozbun and the Massachusetts Biotechnology Education Foundation used to find an executive director.

Bridgestar (www.bridgestar.org), an initiative of the Bridgespan Group, provides a nonprofit management job board, content, and tools designed to help nonprofit organizations build strong leadership teams and individuals pursue career paths as nonprofit leaders.