Recruiting for your not-for-profit

Good people for good jobs

Recruiting for your not-for-profit: Good people for good jobs

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Terminology

The not-for-profit sector operates in all Australian states and has to cope with a number of different legal formats. Consequently, there are a number of terms for what are functionally much the same things. Just for ease of reading, we've settled on a common set of names.

When we say	**'board'**	**we mean:** 'board' or 'council' or 'executive' or 'committee of management'
When we say	**'board member'**	**we mean:** 'board member' or 'council member' or 'executive member' or 'committee member' or 'trustee' or 'director'
When we say	**'chair'**	**we mean:** 'chair' or 'chairperson' or 'president'
When we say	**'chief executive officer (CEO)'**	**we mean:** 'CEO' or 'executive officer' or 'head honcho'
When we say	**'not-for-profit sector'**	**we mean:** 'not-for-profit sector' or 'non-profit sector' or 'community sector' or 'third sector' or 'voluntary sector' or 'for-purpose sector'
When we say	**'not-for-profit'**	**we mean:** 'incorporated association' or 'organisation' or 'company limited by guarantee' or 'cooperative' or simply 'community group'

The not-for-profit difference

A community group lives or dies by its staffing. From the chief executive to the receptionist, staff can support your mission or sink it. It's vital to get the right people.

In the world of commerce there's an easy way to get the best people, at least in theory: you offer more money, and better people apply. In the community sector it's a bit more complicated – partly because you may not have the money, partly because even if you did you'd prefer to spend it on the clients or your cause, and partly because there's always someone who's going to complain, 'When I give money to a charity I want it all to be spent saving kittens [or whatever], not paying for pen pushers.'

Not-for-profit work is a value proposition. You're not trying to make money – an endeavour that's compatible with a range of attitudes to the public welfare. Rather, you're trying to do good in the world. It's important that your staff shares those priorities.

But you still want to run an efficient organisation that is prepared to pay what it costs to do what it has to do. That means an organisation that pays its employees decently, remunerating them in line with their skill-set. The not-for-profit that stiffs its own workers is not sustainable (or ethical), especially when the workforce runs so hard that it has more than its share of burnout and staff turnover.

The sector attracts more than its share of dedicated do-gooders driven by their love for the public benefit. (It also has more than its share of timeservers loyal to the old Soviet motto 'We pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us', but we're going to assume that doesn't apply to you.)

Virtue alone, however, is not enough. In the interests of the people you serve and work so hard for, it's vital that every position in your organisation is filled by someone who can do the job very, very well. Recruiting and retaining those people is what this guide aims to help you to do.

Getting started with recruiting

It all starts with the mission. To do what you want to do – to carry out your strategic plan – you have a particular staffing structure, which is detailed in your business plan, along with a means to fund it.

Now let's imagine a particular position within that structure is vacant. The previous incumbent has resigned, or the position is new and nobody's been appointed to it yet. You have the money to pay someone to fill it, and you've assessed that the role needs to be filled. It's time to start the recruitment process.

Forming a selection committee

Once you've established that you do need someone, and have got everybody relevant to sign off on it, the next step is to pass the job to a selection committee – either an ad hoc round-up of relevant people or a standing committee of the board.

Special cases – selecting a CEO, for example – may call for special provisions.

The more senior the vacancy, the more trouble you'll take, usually, in filling it, but a search or selection 'committee' – even if that's just two people – is pretty much a given. Any personnel choice, no matter how low in the chain, will be more successful if you can bring at least a couple of different perspectives to bear. Your panel should ideally consist of equal numbers of men and women, and be diverse in other ways too, and representative of your community focus.

There'll be someone from HR, if you have an HR department. There'll be someone from the section where the job sits – preferably the supervisor who's going to oversee the newbie's work. You might ask the person who's leaving, assuming they're leaving on good terms, to lend their expertise and answer questions about what skills and attributes, for example, are needed in a successful replacement.

If the incumbent is on the selection committee, the other committee members should be mindful of the bias this may bring to the deliberations. There'll be a tendency in those circumstances for the committee to drift towards someone who'll do things the way they've been done before. This can be a problem if what you're looking for is a fresh new eye. Similarly, changes to the job description (or the pay) may become a problem.

Conflicts of interest

If any member of the selection committee finds that they're assessing an applicant where there's a perceived or actual conflict of interest (where the applicant is a family member, friend or former colleague), they have to declare the conflict, perceived or actual, to the panel. Such a declaration isn't a barrier to being on the panel – after all, if you're considering internal applications most of the people on the committee are likely to know the person – but it's a necessary precaution nonetheless. If in doubt, declare a conflict and then let the panel make a decision on ongoing involvement.

Recruitment timetable

How long have you got? When does there absolutely have to be someone in that position? Set down that date and work backwards:

After you've chosen a candidate

- Once you've signed up your chosen person, how much notice will they have to give in their current role? Two weeks? Three months?
- Once you've cleared the person you want, how long will it take to negotiate a package?
- Once you have a name, how long will it take to check their references, run required checks (e.g. police check, working-with-children check) and look over their social media?

Before starting recruitment

- Once you have all the data on the table, how long will it take to determine the successful candidate?
- Once you have a short shortlist, are you going to set the candidates any assignments, give them any tests or review their record?
- Once you have a shortlist, how long will it take to interview those candidates? Who else has to be involved, and what are their timelines?
- Once the applications are in (how many do you expect to receive?), how long will it take you to read them and draw up a shortlist for interview?
- For how long are you going to advertise?
- How long will it take you to draw up a position description and write an advertisement?

Don't let any of those dates slip or you'll run over time. To help achieve this, we recommend limiting the number of interviews you conduct – say three to five candidates in the first round, and no more than two if you do a second round of interviews. Be ruthless and tune in to your gut instinct (as well as considering your selection criteria, of course) when reviewing applications. Telephone interviews can be a useful way of doing an initial cull. Don't waste your time (and the candidates' time) doing a hundred face-to-face interviews.

Sample recruitment timeline

Week 1

- ***Review position description***
- ***Write advertisement***

Weeks 2-3

- ***Advertise***

Week 4

- ***Review applications***
- ***Shortlist candidates***
- ***Start interviews***

Week 5

- ***Finish interviews***
- ***Choose preferred candidate***
- ***Check references***

Week 6

- ***Make offer***
- ***Negotiate package***
- ***Successful candidate gives notice***

Week 10

- ***Successful candidate starts induction***

Writing a job description

See appendix 2, page 77: Sample job description

You're getting a person in to fill a gap in your organisation. To know what kind of person you need, you need to know the shape of the gap. After that, it's like the Japanese game show Human Tetris (also known as *Brain Wall*): the selection committee holds up the template, and the applicants have to see if they can squeeze inside it.

Every position, from the top of the organisation to the bottom, should have a job description, a written record of:

- what the person in the job has to do (including responsibilities and accountabilities)
- what skills and abilities are necessary to perform those duties
- what qualifications, credentials, licences, clearances or experience are required
- who the person in the role reports to
- who the person in the role oversees.

The first job of the selection committee is to draw up a new job description (see the example on page 56), or to review the one that the last person in the job worked to and decide whether it needs updating.

Has the work changed? Does the organisation want to move things in a new direction? How will the job description tie in with the strategic plan? Are there things that need clarification? Have there been times when someone has said, 'That's not my job', and you'd thought it was?

At the core of the job description are the duties and essential functions of the position. Specify the purpose of the work and the results that are required, rather than going into detail about how the function is to be performed – focus on the concrete achievements you expect to see for your money. As far as possible, these should be quantitative, rather than qualitative – numbers, rather than matters of opinion or judgment. This cuts down on unpleasant and (even worse) inconclusive arguments later.

The duties and essential functions of the role should be outlined in as much detail as possible, because these are going to form the basis of the agreement you have with the person you eventually choose. You want these things done; you need to be able to get the person to do them, and to manage their performance if they don't do them to the standard required. You can't blame someone for not doing something if you don't tell them beforehand that they'll be required to do it.

List the tasks. Rank them. Which are the most central? What attributes will a person need to have to carry them out successfully? Separate these out – they're your key selection criteria. Remember, it's easier to teach someone new skills than to change their attitude, so carefully consider 'soft' attributes (personality traits, attitudes, behaviours), not just 'hard' skills such as the ability to operate particular machinery.