

WHAT BOARDS AND EXECUTIVES NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EXECUTIVE SEARCHES

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Board members and staff of philanthropic institutions regularly reach out to CMF to learn more about executive searches. The Ask CMF team has curated the following resources for those engaging with executive search firms or guiding an internally-driven executive search process for a grantmaking organization.

Recommended Resources

BoardSource (Don Tebbe) – “Chief Executive Transitions: How to Hire and Support a Nonprofit CEO, Second Edition”

2019, 163-PDF or Print Resource – Available for Purchase (\$45)

<https://boardsource.org/product/chief-executive-transitions-second-edition/>

Summary: This resource serves as one of the definitive texts on the topic of nonprofit executive transitions, particularly as framed around the board and “transition task force” as significant players in the transition process. This resource frames the transition process around six primary tasks that occur throughout an executive transition process, with the search process comprising just one aspect of the work. This guide includes an extensive transition checklist and toolkit, including sample documents that accompany the process.

Council on Foundations – “Hiring a New CEO Resource Guide”

2014, Online Resource – Requires COF Member Log-in

<https://www.cof.org/content/hiring-new-ceo-resource-guide>

Summary: This resource guide (“kit”) for grantmakers includes information on using an executive search consultant (i.e., things to look for when considering a firm, typical fee arrangements), search process and timetables (with examples), a sample CEO job description, determining reasonable executive compensation and CEO compensation findings.

National Center for Family Philanthropy (Susan Crites Prices) – “Help Wanted: The Complete Guide to Hiring a Family Foundation CEO”

2019, 48-page PDF - Available to CMF Members via NCFP website

<https://www.ncfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Help-Wanted-Guide-to-Hiring-a-Fam-Fdn-CEO-NCFP-2012SINGLE-USE.pdf>

Summary: This “first-ever” guide for hiring a family foundation CEO will help families figure out where they want their foundation to go and how to find the right person to take them there. This resource is particularly useful to family foundations due to its focus on family dynamics in the search process and consideration of family/board members as candidates for the CEO position. Sample job descriptions and an overview of the search process are included in this condensed guide, inspired by interviews with NCFP members. Sections of this resource include: (1) the unique role of a family foundation CEO, (2) stages of the search process, and (3) special issues for families, including hiring family member, considering internal candidates, the role of the current CEO in the search and utilizing interim leadership.

The Bridgespan Group – “Finding the Right ED: Creating and Managing an Effective Search Committee”

2009, 8-page PDF or Online Resource

- *Creating a Search Committee*
<https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/hiring/creating-managing-search-committee>
- *Finding the Right Executive Director*
<https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/images/articles/finding-the-right-ed-effective-search-committee/FindingRightED.pdf>

Summary: This resource offers nonprofit organizations a framework to understand how to utilize a search committee as a key aspect of the executive search process. This resource is particularly useful for organizations just beginning the search process that are seeking to understand the basic tasks and frameworks involved in a search for a CEO/Executive Director.

About Ask CMF

This document was authored by Brittany Kienker, Ph.D., Knowledge Insights Expert in Residence for the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF). CMF members can find answers to their most pressing questions through CMF’s Knowledge Insights division, including Ask CMF, the Knowledge Center and the Sample Documents Hub. Ask CMF is a free service to CMF members, available through the “Ask CMF” link on the CMF homepage or by visiting <https://www.michiganfoundations.org/practice/ask-cmf>.

The “What Boards and Executives Need to Know” series of resources is designed to address questions of interest to board members and senior leaders of grantmaking organizations. These resources may be particularly useful for orientations, board trainings and general professional development and provide better understanding of key concepts that are necessary for the success of the governance and management of foundations in the field.

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