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RECRUITING THE PUBLIC LIBRARY DIRECTOR

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The recruitment and hiring of professional librarians have received considerable attention in the library literature during the past decade. A central concern of many of these studies is the need for well-defined guidelines and procedures, with emphasis on modern personnel practices and the participatory role of the library staff in the selection process. Most of the research reports on the situation in academic libraries; nevertheless, the results can be used as a basis to formulate policy in the public library. Library boards with little or no experience in personnel matters may need to review some of the articles cited below before planning the recruitment process.

With reference to earlier studies, and with the author's personal experience in personnel management, this paper presents a method, a general set of directions, for the recruitment of the public library director. The method is not intended to be prescriptive, but rather a framework within which a library board can conduct a successful search. This study is roughly a chronological outline, with discussion, of the principal steps a library board should follow in the search for a director. At the outset the library board must understand that filling a professional vacancy is a time-consuming task, which requires in most cases a minimum of four months.[1]

I. Form a Search Committee

As soon as the vacancy becomes known, the library board must meet to formulate a plan of action. The first action is normally the organization of a group called a Search Committee. Its membership should consist of members of the library board, plus representation from the library's professional and nonprofessional staff. If the library board is unusually large, two non-board members may be sufficient. The non-board members may be appointed by the library board or elected by the library staff. The Search Committee approach to recruitment ensures representation of a wide range of opinion and promotes a feeling of participation by all interested parties.[2]

Once convened, the Search Committee selects a chairperson and then proceeds to define the recruitment process and to schedule anticipated events. Major considerations, as found in the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) guidelines, applicable to public libraries are: (1) date for completing list of final nominees and date of appointment; (2) number of nominees to be recommended to the hiring authority; (3) affirmative action and equal opportunity requirements; (4) matters of financial and staff resources; (5) documentation of committee actions; (6) need for confidentiality and discretion; and (7) any unique circumstances associated with the position.[3]

It is also advisable to appoint an Administrative Subcommittee to handle the paperwork involved with advertising the position, assembling candidates' credentials, and screening unqualified applicants. Its membership should come from the Search Committee and have the same chairperson.

II. Write Job Description

The purpose of the job description is to serve as a standard against which the candidates' qualifications can be measured.[4] The job description includes a statement of responsibilities and duties, required qualifications, reporting structure of the library, supervisory responsibilities, library budget, salary, and fringe benefits.[5]

III. Advertise Vacancy

The job description is the basis for preparing the job advertisement. The job advertisement is the primary vehicle for publicizing the vacancy to the library profession. Essential elements of a good job description are: (1) job title; (2) duties/responsibilities; (3) qualifications (education, experience, personal characteristics); (4) description of library and community; (5) minimum salary; (6) fringe benefits, including vacation and retirement; (7) date of availability; (8) organization to contact (preferably specific named person); and (9) closing date for applications.

For wide exposure, the advertisement can be distributed to national library publications, such as *American Libraries, Library Journal, LJ/SLJ Hotline,* local and regional library schools, and the state library agency. Care must be taken not to overlook unsolicited applications already in the library's files. The Administrative Subcommittee is responsible for prompt acknowledgment of the applications as they arrive.

IV. Screen Applications

A public library can expect an average of fifty applications for an administrative position.[6] In this stage, the Administrative Subcommittee assembles appropriate credentials (résumé, references, official application form, if needed, etc.) and completes a file for each applicant. After the closing date for application, the Administrative Subcommittee should meet to screen unqualified applicants, those who do not meet the requirements as set forth in the job description. Candidates cut in this first round are notified immediately.

V. Evaluate Qualified Applicants

Candidates who satisfy the requirements for the position become part of an official pool of applicants for further consideration. Narrowing this pool of candidates to a list of final candidates is perhaps the most difficult part of the Search Committee's task. Success of the evaluation process is contingent upon the formulation of an appropriate set of criteria against which all the candidates can be fairly rated.[7] One approach is for the Search Committee to list the characteristics deemed desirable in a chief librarian. Here the Search Committee must keep in mind what is called for in the job description. These characteristics can be organized into categories to facilitate the evaluation process. Each category is then weighted with a certain number of points, with all categories combined equivalent to one hundred

points. A hypothetical evaluation system might be as follows:

Category	*Rating Scale (100 points)*
Education, including continuing education	20
Experience	45
Professional contributions	06
Publications	05
References	20
Other (awards, honors, etc.)	04

Using the evaluation system as a measurement tool, the Search Committee members can evaluate everyone in the pool of candidates in an objective manner. As an example of how the system would work, a member of the Search Committee might rate candidate Smith as follows: education, eighteen points; experience, thirty-seven points; professional contributions, four points; publications, five points; references, eighteen points; and other, four points. Hence candidate Smith would score eighty-six points in total. Next, candidate Smith would get a composite score (the sum of the individual scores from each member of the Search Committee divided by the number of committee members). After this process is completed for each candidate, all the candidates can be ranked. Finally, following some debate and discussion, the Search Committee should be able to agree on the top three candidates to be called in for an interview.

VI. Plan Interviews

Getting ready for the interviews is mostly a matter of logistics and planning. This stage, to avoid miscues, is best handled by the chairperson of the Search Committee. One day is usually enough time to learn about each candidate, and it is desirable to schedule all the interviews in a narrow time frame. The normal pattern of events is for the chairperson to contact the top three candidates by telephone to establish date and time of the interview, payment of candidates' expenses, and travel plans. It may be advisable to discuss travel and other expenses immediately after it is established that the candidate is still interested in the position. Most qualified observers agree that the library should always pay for the interview expenses.

The next step is the preparation of an interview schedule for each candidate. This is an hour-by-hour account, a calendar, of all activities on the day of the interview. Desirable components of a good interview include a tour of the library, a meeting with the professional staff, a meeting with the nonprofessional staff, a general session with the chairperson on the library's budget, general programs, services, etc., and the formal interview with the full Search Committee. Many personnel people recommend that an interview schedule be sent to each candidate several days before the interview takes place.[8]

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Along with the interview schedule, it is appropriate to include background information about the library and the community. Useful documents include the library's budget and last annual report, a list of library board and professional staff members, chamber of commerce publications, etc. Maag observed that candidates for academic positions who received few documents were often negative about the picture of the library obtained during their interviews.[9]

VII. Complete Interviews

The interview is an important step in selecting the right person for the job; proper judgment here by the Search Committee can help reduce turnover and general organizational problems.[10] The Search Committee must decide on an interview technique and some of the questions to ask before the interview begins.[11] Two types of interviews, called directed and undirected, or patterned and unpatterned, are used in libraries. In the directed technique, the candidate responds to a specific list of questions. In the undirected approach, the candidate, led by the interviewer, does most of the talking.[12] In actual practice, a combination of both techniques is probably best. In a successful interview a candidate will learn about all details of the job and even some of the negative aspects of the library in question.[13] The chairperson can smoothly initiate the interview by asking the candidate to relate educational and work experiences.[14] After the interview, the chairperson can wrap up the interview process with comments covering the timetable for the final selection and the notification procedure.

VIII. Hire Director

Immediately after all interviews have been completed, the Search Committee is ready to meet and discuss the results of the interviews. At this point, names of approved candidates are ranked in order of preference and forwarded to the hiring authority for final action. The library board usually has the authority to appoint the library director. Once the library board agrees on a candidate to be the new director, the chairperson makes an official offer, with a written notice of appointment. Such letters of appointment typically cover position title, starting date, salary, fringe benefits, and a deadline for the candidate to respond to the offer (normally fourteen days is allowed). Upon receipt of written acceptance, publicity of the appointment is frequently sent to local television and newspaper outlets, library publications, such as *American Libraries,* and the state library agency.

Conclusion

Everyone involved is very lucky if the entire recruitment process ends without a hitch. Many distracting, unexpected things can happen—applications arrive after the closing deadline, an interviewee misses a plane connection, an M.D. member of the Search Committee is beeped from the interview, etc. All of this reaffirms the need for thoughtful planning and, more important, patience by all. In most cases, a public library in need of extra guidance can always ask for consultant services from its state library agency.

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