

Finding Your Next Executive Director

© 2020 by John B. McHugh and David Beacom

By

John B. McHugh and David Beacom

Dealing with Executive Director Turnover

Executive Directors (EDs) leave associations or societies for various reasons, whether by their own choice or when their contract isn't renewed. Recruiting and onboarding a new ED is a high-stakes process that can be either tremendously successful or an absolute disaster.

Hiring an incompetent ED with poor people skills will depress morale and lead to expensive and disruptive staff turnover. A less-than-competent ED can also virtually guarantee poor financial performance across the organization. Hiring the right ED is crucial for these and countless other reasons.

The cost of an ED is inherently expensive—with even the most modest salaries for leadership jobs starting in the low six figures, plus perks and benefits. In addition, the wrong hire can distract the organization from its mission. Members often end up feeling shortchanged, even disrespected, when there's a lack of direction from the top. Boards of directors can lose their way, as it is a core responsibility of the ED to steer the elected leadership's course and assist in its development.

Serving Many Masters

The job of an ED is unusual and challenging in many ways, not least because the ED must please so many different groups within an association. Consider these likely constituencies and how their needs may be at odds from time to time: the president, the executive committee, the board of directors, the chapters or sections, the broader membership, advertisers, even the entire profession or industry served by the organization. Not to forget staff members.

Each of these constituencies has its own expectations, often in seeming conflict, of the ED.

Balancing Mission and Profits

While associations operate differently from corporations, where profit tends to be king, associations still need to be run in a way that enables salaries to be paid and the lights to stay on. Associations and societies conduct many different and highly varied businesses including conferences, certification and other forms of continuing education, publishing books and periodicals, developing professional or industry standards, and sponsoring trade shows.

Ideally, every one of these activities should earn a profit (net operating income) for the organization to stay in business and build up that all-important reserve fund. And, truth be told, there will always be association activities that by their very nature cannot be expected to be profitable but yet must be supported by funds earned by the group's core programs.

Given all that, it's clear: The ED must always walk a fine line, serving both the mission and the bottom line.

Where to Find Your Next Executive Director

EDs can come from many different backgrounds. Does a volunteer officer want the job? Maybe a retired military officer or academic? Perhaps another type of leader prominent in the field? Could it be the organization's number-two executive, its chief financial officer, or perhaps its in-house content expert?

We have worked for or consulted with organizations that have gone down essentially all of these paths in order to hire EDs. Some have worked out well, others have been so-so, and a few have been catastrophic—setting an organization back for years.

For a complete discussion on this topic, Harvey Kane and Jack McHugh have co-authored two articles on this subject.

- (PM -80, *Hiring a Society/Association CEO Part I; Overview, Tips, and Guidance*, 2020, 8 pages
- (PM-81, *Hiring a Society/Association CEO Part II, Where to Find Candidates, Search Committees, and Best Candidates*, 2020, 8 pages

To request these articles, email jack@johnbmchugh.com **LinkedIn** www.linkedin.com/in/john-b-mchugh-21651811/

McHugh- Beacom Executive Recruiting Services

John B. “Jack” McHugh and David Beacom are experienced executive recruiters with a specialty in commercial and nonprofit publishing, including college, business, technical, professional, religious, and association publications. Jack and David have written extensively on effective publishing management and will draw on their expertise as successful publishing executives. They can also assist you in recruiting for a variety of association and society positions, including, CEOs (Executive Director.)

Tap into their extensive knowledge of the publishing industry and associations to find top talent. Save on recruiting costs as they charge a fixed fee instead of the costly retainer percentage used by most executive search firms.

Consider these McHugh and Beacom advantages:

- Save expensive staff time involved in screening resumes and preliminary interviewing of candidates.
- Use McHugh and Beacom as third-party independent interviewers to validate your own observations.
- Get an expert evaluation of prospects and final candidates.
- Receive a comprehensive interview report customized to your job needs. (This service is available on an a la carte per interview basis.)
- Save money by paying a flat fee vs. typical 33 1/3% of first-year salary charged by executive search firms.

Free Expert Interviews http://johnbmchugh.com/expert_interviews.htm

- I-1, *McHugh Interviews McHugh on Consulting*, 2013, revised
- I-11, *McHugh Interviews McHugh on Executive Recruiting*, 2011

Jack McHugh, 414-351-3056

Email jack@johnbmchugh.com,

Website <http://www.johnbmchugh.com>.

LinkedIn <https://bit.ly/2JL0r06>

David Beacom, 202-549-7434

Email dfb@davidbeacom.com

Website <https://davidbeacom.com/about/>

LinkedIn <https://bit.ly/2LxRcC0>

9/15/20 LN, FR to DB, 10/5 DB, JAF;