

Assuring a *Successful* COLLEGE PRESIDENT SEARCH

An ACTA Guide to Presidential Search, Screening, and Selection

By Robert C. Dickeson



AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI
Institute for Effective Governance®



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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“ A successful board is one that is prepared for a vacancy before it has begun. Imagine how compelling it would be to share with presidential candidates how they would be evaluated in advance and then to ask them how they would go about achieving the board’s expectations!

—Robert C. Dickeson



Assuring a *Successful* COLLEGE PRESIDENT SEARCH

The purpose of this guide is to assist governing board trustees in the execution of their most important task: the selection of a president who will lead the institution in the years ahead. Most studies about college presidential tenure indicate that the average tenure of a president is now under six years. The reasons for presidential turnover are varied and may include factors beyond the control of the governing board. But in a large number of instances, it may simply be a question of inadequate fit between the trustees' expectations and the executive's performance. Because searches are time-consuming and expensive, and because disruptions in presidential leadership can bring about institutional discontinuity or instability—or both—it is critical that today's trustees approach the process of finding a new leader with care, adequate preparation, and savvy understanding.


What follows are a dozen elements of the process that are intended to improve the chances for a successful presidential search.

1. Preparation: Setting Realistic Expectations

When there is a vacancy in the presidency, boards often respond with undue urgency to fill the position immediately. A search firm is hired. The old job description is dusted off and advertised. A committee is thrown together and told to get going. Such a knee-jerk, slap-dash approach is unlikely to lead to stellar results.

The end of one presidency and the beginning of another creates an ideal opportunity for trustees to perform some good stock-taking. After appointing a competent interim president to take some pressure off, it is time to reflect. What kind of president do we really need going forward? The next 10 years in higher education will not at all be like the last 10; what expertise, skills, and abilities will be required in the new leader to take us toward a successful future?

A sound presidential search takes time. Such a search takes money. The process of search and selection should be thought through—from beginning to end—in advance.



It might be helpful to imagine the end product and work our way back, rather than to focus on immediate first steps. For example, how about crafting the evaluation form for the next president now, not doing so as an afterthought post-hiring? We could establish key expectations, identify specific goals and objectives to be achieved, and forecast how we will undertake this assessment. A successful board is one that is prepared for a vacancy before it has begun. Imagine how compelling it would be to share with presidential candidates how they would be evaluated in advance and then to ask them how they would go about achieving the board's expectations!

2. Pitfalls to Avoid

■ Do not delegate your authority to any person, committee, or firm.

The board and only the board has the authority and responsibility to select the president. All others are advisory. All others make recommendations. You will want to listen carefully to input about the selection, but such input cannot be held responsible. Only you have the fiduciary duty to perform this important task.

■ Be clear about whether the interim president is a candidate for the permanent job.


One of the first questions that potential candidates will ask is, “Is the interim also a candidate?” If the answer is yes, most candidates will withdraw from consideration, assuming that the search is “wired” on behalf of that individual. When the interim is hired, clarity about his or her role is essential.

■ Do not conduct a sham search.

Occasionally, trustees have an internal candidate in mind that they intend to appoint as the next president. But they go through the appearance of a legitimate search so as to proclaim, “We went through a national search and found the right person here at home.” This approach is not only dishonest, it wastes time, money, and often the reputations of innocent candidates who were misled.

■ Know that not all searches are successful.

Try as you may, things sometimes do not work out as planned, and you may have to face the embarrassing but essential truth that the search has failed. However, it is important to differentiate between a failed search and an extended search. Far better to start over again than to hire a second-rate candidate who does not really meet



the board's expectations. Consider your options as to an interim, explore a change in firms or process, and conduct a new search with renewed spirit to get it accomplished this time.

3. Presidential Search Checklist, a Start-to-Finish Plan

- ❑ Review all statutes, board bylaws, policies, and regulations—both internal and external—which might govern the presidential search.
 - This may involve the legal counsel and the director of human resources and may include such matters as open-meeting rules and equal opportunity employment.
 - There is nothing worse than ending up in court, discovering too late that you have violated your own policies.

Q: Are the internal rules usable, or are there issues that require amendments before proceeding?

- ❑ Designate a chair of the search & screening committee.
 - This should always be a trustee, preferably one whose term will enable working with the newly appointed president.
 - The chair should be able to meet the time commitment required to carry out the tasks of the committee for the duration of the process.
 - An administrative assistant should be assigned to help with the entire search process.
- ❑ Decide whether to retain a consultant and/or search firm to assist the committee and the board in the search process.
 - Consultants should have sufficient academic and administrative standing to be able to guide the work of the search firm and to earn the trust and respect of the institutional community.
 - A separate consultant is costly. Determine whether it is better to have a search consultant, search firm, or both.
- ❑ Appoint the search & screening committee.
 - Typically composed of seven-to-fifteen members, appointed by the chair of the committee.

- Usually representative of key constituent groups: faculty, students, staff, and often alumni and community members. It is preferable to appoint such members, not have them elected.
- Committee members must agree to adhere to the ground rules of the search process, including strict confidentiality. Ensure that all members understand early in the process the consequences of violating this confidentiality.
- Members of the board should become aware of the ground rules and expectations of the search process.

See: Appointing a Search & Screening Committee, page 8

- Issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to retain a search firm or consultant to assist with the search and screening (but not selection) of the new president.

See: Draft RFP for Search Firms, page 17

- Identify desired characteristics and qualifications for the new president. This is an ideal time for institutional stock-taking; for determining where the institution is, where it wants to head, and what kind of leader it will need to get there.
 - Desired characteristics should be achievable; avoid the “walks on water” syndrome.
 - Qualifications should be proximate to the needs of the job.
 - Avoid the “pendulum syndrome:” searching for the opposite of the predecessor president.
 - Focus on expertise, not personality characteristics like “charisma.”
- Select the search firm after reviewing the proposals from all firms and interviewing the three-to-five finalist firms. Enter into a contract with the search firm that makes clear the relative roles and responsibilities of all parties.

See: Suggested Questions for Interviewing Search Firms, page 22

- Develop and strictly adhere to a search calendar.

See: Drafting a Search Calendar, page 6


- ❑ Develop a budget for the search, including provision for staff support.

See: Constructing a Search Budget, page 7

- ❑ Review and approve the firm's recommendations for a recruitment plan and for advertising.

Q: Does the recruitment plan cast the broadest possible net to secure the interest of top candidates? Do the proposed advertisements accurately depict the institution and its leadership needs?

- ❑ Determine the salary range for the new president as well as benefits and perquisites to be offered. Many candidates will want to know these elements before deciding whether to apply.
- ❑ Engage the entire campus in helping to build a strong candidate pool. Consultants and search firms, however helpful to the purpose of generating candidates, should never be the sole contributors to the process. In all cases, information about each candidate should be made available to the entire board, not just the search committee.
- ❑ Screen all candidates individually and fairly through a process determined by the search & screening committee to assure that the best candidates are advanced and that legal requirements for personnel decisions are met.
- ❑ Identify the top 10-to-12 candidates and secure their permission to check references. Conduct airport interviews with the top candidates in person (preferably) or by telephone or virtually.
- ❑ Determine the three-to-five finalists for the position. Secure their permission to make their finalist status public. Schedule on-campus interviews with the finalists and their spouses. Trustee members of the committee may want to visit the home institutions of the finalists for additional background checking.
- ❑ Conduct on-campus interviews with the finalists and maximize the involvement of members of the campus community.
- ❑ Prepare a final report from the search & screening committee to the board that advances its recommendations for selection, unranked. All records and files pertaining to the search should be preserved.

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- ❑ Select a president by board action. The board may choose to conduct additional interview(s) of the finalist(s).
 - ❑ Negotiate and complete a contract with the new president. The contract should include a plan for assessing presidential performance.
 - ❑ Begin planning a successful transition for the new president.
 - Arrange for a visit to the community by the new president's family.
 - Conduct a formal review of institutional goals and expectations between the board and the new president.
 - Work with the president and spouse to introduce them to the people and organizations on the campus and in the community.

4. Drafting a Search Calendar

This draft assumes a six-month process, from start to selection. Some institutions take up to nine months to complete the tasks.

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Month #1: | Review policies; appoint committee; designate a chair; retain consultant; issue RFP for search firms; identify desired characteristics and qualifications; hire search firm. |
| Month #2: | Approve and initiate recruitment plan and begin advertising. |
| Month #3: | Continue recruitment and begin reviewing the applicant pool. |
| Month #4: | Reduce the applicant pool to 10–12; conduct airport interviews; select three-to-five finalists. |
| Month #5: | Conduct on-campus interviews; make recommendations to the board. |
| Month #6: | Board selects president. |

5. Constructing a Search Budget

Governing boards are often criticized for the costs of conducting a presidential search. One of the first questions media representatives will ask about is the expenses associated with the process. Trustees should go into the process open-eyed about these costs and which institutional budget will bear them.

What follows is a guide to typical cost items and, subject to inflation, approximate amounts.

ITEM	POSSIBLE RANGE	OUR BUDGET
Search consultant (optional)	\$25,000–\$50,000	
Search firm	\$90,000–\$200,000	
Committee staff support (part-time)—administrative assistant, secretarial	\$25,000–\$40,000	
Office expenses—stationery, telephone, postage, technical, etc.	\$2,500–\$3,500	
Advertising— <i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i> , <i>Diverse: Issues in Higher Education</i> , other journals	\$6,000–\$12,000	
Candidates' travel—semi-finalists, finalists, spouses, receptions, etc.	\$18,000–\$24,000	
Search committee expenses—travel, miscellaneous	\$1,500–\$2,500	
TOTAL COSTS	\$168,000–\$332,000	

Additional items to consider:

- \$ _____ Search firm expenses beyond its fee
- \$ _____ Additional board expenses
- \$ _____ Allocated space for the search committee
- \$ _____ Renovations to president's home
- \$ _____ Moving expenses for new president



6. Appointing a Search & Screening Committee

■ Why use a search committee?

The search for a president is hard work. A typical search will yield over a hundred applicants. Many more prospects will be nominated for the position, and still others will need to be courted to attract their interest in the job. All candidates' credentials will need to be read and reviewed. References should be checked. Background information is important to learn. Screening—separating the wheat from the chaff—may require interviews. All this activity requires time, dedication, and focused engagement. A full board of trustees usually cannot tackle these tasks in addition to their day jobs, and thus a task force—a search & screening committee—is used in the overwhelming majority of searches.

■ How should the committee be composed?

In many instances, a board will insist that a search committee be composed solely of trustees. This approach certainly affirms the primacy of the board's legal and often statutory authority; it alone has the responsibility to select the next president. It also further avoids undue distraction or influence from outside interests.

On the other hand, think about the candidate ultimately chosen as president. He or she comes to the job under a cloud. The new president must work with, persuade, and lead the institution's many stakeholders in order to be successful. A president searched for and screened solely by trustees is disadvantaged at the outset and must try to overcome the stigma imposed by constituencies who feel they were ignored.

It is axiomatic that **people tend to support that which they helped to create**. Participation in the search committee also confers a notion of ownership in the result. The successful president comes to campus with a degree of credibility and legitimacy derived from the sense that stakeholders may be more likely to support the board's decision by virtue of their participation.

Search & screening committees should be large enough to represent major constituencies—faculty, students, staff, alumni, donors, and community members—but not so large as to become unwieldy. The smaller the committee, the easier to schedule and organize meetings. As suggested earlier, seven-to-fifteen members is typical.

Often, campus constituencies want to elect representatives to serve on the search & screening committee (e.g., faculty senate elects a delegate to the committee). However, such electees sometimes bring to the table a number of grievances, real or imagined. Some individuals may have an axe to grind or see their membership on



the committee as an opportunity to bring home the bacon to the group that elected them. This eventuality is most unfortunate. The search for a new president requires persons and processes focused solely on finding the right leader for the institution as a whole. Consensus—while valuable—is not strictly necessary, and the board should take care not to settle on a candidate purely because he or she is the least offensive to the greatest number of campus constituencies.

■ **Consider nominating rather than electing.**

An alternative to electing members of the search & screening committee is to have the board chair select members from among nominees who meet desired characteristics more proximate to a successful search.

What follows is a suggested form for this purpose.



MEMORANDUM

From: Chair, Board of Trustees

To: Members of the University Community

Re: Call for Nominations to the Presidential Search & Screening Committee

Dear colleagues,

The presidential search process requires the active participation of a special group of individuals who are willing to serve in important roles as members of the search & screening committee. In the interest of securing the best possible candidates for membership, I am asking you to nominate outstanding individuals from whom I will appoint up to 12 to serve, along with three trustees.

Desirable characteristics for the makeup of the committee would include:

- Understands and embraces the mission of the institution, is student-centered, and would be an effective member of a team.
- Is representative of the diversity of our university community, including appropriate balances with respect to gender, ethnicity, divisional representation, long- and short-term seniority, tenured and tenure-track.
- Displays personal characteristics such as critical thinking, analytic skills, problem-solving, fair-mindedness, empathy, and openness to differing viewpoints.
- Has earned a high level of credibility as demonstrated by respect of peers, previous leadership experience, and professional accomplishment.

Response: I hereby nominate _____ of the _____ department as a member of the presidential search & screening committee. Based on the board chair's criteria, I suggest this individual for the following reasons (please cite examples):


Date: _____ My name: _____



■ **Charge to the Search & Screening Committee:**

Thank you for agreeing to serve on this important committee. The responsibility of helping to advance candidates for selection as our next president is an imposing one, and your careful attention to this task as well as the additional time you are investing in the process are very much appreciated.

1. ***Role.*** There are three aspects to presidential searches: searching, screening, and selecting. Our role as a committee is to search and screen. Only the board of trustees has the authority to select.
2. ***Confidentiality.*** It is an absolute requirement that all matters related to the search and screening process be kept confidential. The very success of the process depends on each member of the committee agreeing to abide by this mandate. Names of candidates and potential candidates, discussions within the committee, and information obtained about candidates via the search process are to be kept within the confines of the committee and are not to be shared elsewhere. Committee members who are found to have violated this requirement will be removed from the committee, and, in the case of a board member, possible disciplinary action may be taken.
3. ***Campus-wide perspective.*** Each member of the committee is deemed to be a “trustee” of the entire institution, not a “delegate” from any part of the campus. We are engaged in the process of finding a leader for the entire institution. Therefore, in our decisions and deliberations, the best interests of the institution should be paramount.
4. ***One spokesperson.*** To ensure that any messages from the committee are accurate, official, and of one voice, the only authorized spokesperson from the committee is the chair.
5. ***Searching.*** You will be expected to assist the search firm and others associated with the search in helping to identify outstanding candidates.
6. ***Screening.*** You will be expected to screen the candidates who come forward in a fair and equitable way and to help identify those candidates who most nearly meet the desired characteristics and qualifications for the presidency. You will also be expected to interview candidates and make recommendations about their relative strengths and weaknesses.
7. ***Freedom from interference.*** The search & screening committee is to operate without pressure or interference from any source.

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8. *Reactions.* As finalists are interviewed on campus, your ability to summarize campus and community reactions to the finalists will be invaluable.
 9. *Internal candidates.* If there are internal candidates for the president position, they are to be treated fairly and equitably as with all other candidates.
 10. *Additional duties.* The chair of the committee may call upon the committee and/or its individual members to take on tasks associated with the search.
 11. *Recommendations.* The committee is charged with recommending three-to-five finalists to the board of trustees, unranked, no later than [Date].

■ **Screen candidates with the help of a scoring rubric.**

All members of a group necessarily bring their individual biases to a task. We see things through our own specific lenses, and this phenomenon can skew or veil important facts when we consider such matters as candidates' credentials. After reading scores of resumes, they often begin to look alike. Some candidates write better application letters than others. Note that a search & screening committee should be evaluating candidates, not letters.

To assist in the screening, a scoring rubric might be helpful. The purpose of a scoring rubric is to assure a higher level of inter-rater reliability. Members of the committee should rate candidates by desired criteria along a three-score scheme. The scores—one, three, and nine—are exponential, not linear, and thus force greater differentiation among candidates' qualifications.

What follows is a sample scoring rubric, to be used in assessing each candidate.



CRITERION AND WEIGHT	DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS (1)	MEETS EXPECTATIONS (3)	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS (9)	SCORE
Exhibits relevant leadership experience (30%)	Minimal examples of experience. Little or no planning, budget, or supervision.	Has led large-scale operations. Examples of size, scope, and productivity of experience.	Leadership of similar organizations with stellar results.	
Proven fundraising expertise (25%)	Little direct impact on fundraising.	Understands principles of development and shows strong involvement.	Exceptional results in fundraising. History of making significant asks. Focuses on planned giving.	
Ability to facilitate change (20%)	No apparent relevant experience in leading change.	Positive examples of leading change projects.	Superior ability to lead change projects that made significant advancements for the organization.	
Demonstrated effectiveness at community relations (15%)	Meager efforts at community involvement.	Has worked with diverse groups in community; seen as a facilitator.	Notable examples of bringing diverse elements together; views the institution as central to economic and social benefits of the community.	
Other (10%)				

Use of a scoring rubric yields a numeric score. You would never select a president based on numbers; such a final decision requires profound **judgment** based on multiple factors. But relative scores of candidates can be useful to facilitate rankings. For example,

- a. **Top third:** Candidates of great promise; more research needed.
- b. **Middle third:** Candidates with marginal promise.
- c. **Bottom third:** Candidates no longer to be considered.



7. Hiring a Search Consultant

■ Why engage a search consultant?

Presidential searches do not happen very often (it is hoped). Often, the institutional memory about searching for a CEO is uneven, and thus not all trustees are up to speed on the best way to go about finding just the right person to serve as your next president. A qualified consultant knows that searches can become tricky and can guide you through the process, from defining the position and your expectations, all the way through to helping negotiate a contract with the new president.

■ Don't typical search firms do the same thing?

Search firms often experience conflicts of interest—between the candidates they represent in their “stable” and the governing board. A special consultant obligated only to you has no pet candidates; he or she is dedicated to the governing board and sees you as the sole client. The consultant would be advising you, step by step, with your best interests in mind. Consultants often work alongside a search firm, cooperating to find you the right candidates, but would always be looking out for the governing board in the process.


■ Can a search consultant be enough?

Given these issues—and the added cost of retaining both a consultant and firm—there may be times when it is appropriate for a board to lead a search itself with a consultant to assist. This possibility should not be overlooked, as it allows the board greater oversight of the potential candidates. A dedicated board collaborating with an experienced consultant may lead to a wider swath of applicants from diverse backgrounds and with diverse experiences outside of academia. However, boards must recognize that this process will require a greater investment of their time.

■ What kinds of services does such a consultant provide?

Here is a selective list of advising services that can be provided to trustees:

- Securing input from trustees about the needs of the institution and the characteristics desired in the next president.
- Helping trustees frame a “blueprint for the future” of the institution, so as to guide both the search activities and your expectations for the new president.
- Assisting with the makeup of the search & screening committee, including advice on board member participation.

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- Identifying talent to serve as the interface between the chair of the board, the search committee, and the search firm.
 - Developing a search calendar that meets trustee needs and dovetails with the institutional calendar.
 - Developing a search budget that takes into account all costs associated with selecting a new president.
 - Drafting the institutional and candidate profiles.
 - Managing an RFP process for selecting a search firm.
 - Developing key and probing questions for interviewing and selecting a search firm.
 - Undertaking background and reference checks for the search firm and all presidential candidates.
 - Drafting a contract for the search firm, including the scope of work.
 - Working with a search firm to develop an approach for recruiting, screening, and evaluating candidates with an eye on encouraging outstanding individuals and identifying prospects for cultivation.
 - Contracting with entities to manage electronically all applications, resumes, letters of reference, and other materials consistent with federal and state laws and regulations.
 - Mediating disputes and other issues that surface throughout the search process between and among trustees and campus constituencies.
 - Convening meetings of interested parties engaged in the search.
 - Preparing and presenting interim reports to the board.
 - Facilitating board interviews of candidates.
 - Helping finalize the terms and conditions of employment for the successful candidate.
 - Interfacing with media representatives as requested.

NOTE: All these services should be **customized** for your search; a solid consultant does not use a boilerplate approach.



8. Selecting a Search Firm

■ Why a search firm and what to look out for.

Most presidential searches today are conducted with the assistance of executive search firms. A good search firm can help an institution by managing a large number of applicants, checking on references, and guiding boards away from costly mistakes. Many firms have sophisticated systems that manage large amounts of data efficiently.

However, there are hundreds of search firms in the U.S., and they are not all alike. Some are global enterprises that search for multiple positions in various fields and employ hundreds of consultants. Others are smaller, often Mom-and-Pop shops with variable experiences in a region. Only a few firms focus solely on higher education as their specialty.

If the board decides to engage a search firm, there are a few warning signs to consider:

- Beware the “bait and switch,” when the front person from the firm comes in to make the sale, but then turns the actual search over to an underling with scant experience.
- A firm that boasts that it has several exceptional candidates in its “stable” may in fact include some misfits or recently fired types. In other words, stables always feature odors you would just as soon avoid.
- Do not enter into a contract with a firm whose compensation is based on the finalist’s salary and benefits. This approach creates a conflict of interest: You hired a firm to represent your interests, but the firm benefits more from hiking the candidate’s compensation. Unacceptable.
- You do not have to use all of the services a search firm may include in its standard contract. Sign up for only those services you cannot do yourself. All contracts are negotiable.

Draft RFP for Search Firms

Board of Trustees
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
Executive Search Consultant Services
Date: _____

The [Institution Name] Board of Trustees invites proposals to provide executive search consultant services to identify and recruit qualified candidates for the position of president of the [Institution Name] and to advise the board on selection and hiring procedures.

Deadline for proposal submission: [Date and Time].


The board of trustees reserves the right to extend this deadline. Three copies of the proposal are required. Proposals should reference this RFP and be addressed and delivered to:

No telephone, electronic, or facsimile proposals will be considered. Proposals received after the time and date for closing will be returned to the proposer unopened.

1. Background Information

The [Institution Name] Board of Trustees is the legal governing body of [Institution Name] and has, among its responsibilities, the selection of the president of the institution. The current president, [Name], has announced retirement plans after serving [Number of Years] in the position. The trustees seek to hire an individual to assume the presidency by [Date], and, in order to meet this goal, intend to make an appointment either late this year or early in [Year].

The board of trustees sees this time of transition as an ideal opportunity to reassess the strengths and challenges facing the institution and to use its reassessment as a guide to identify the traits and characteristics desired in a new president. The board expects to build on a positive legacy of [Number of Years] as a [Institution Description] that is nationally prominent and dedicated to high academic and cultural standards. At the same time,



the board recognizes that the times call for thoughtful innovation, stronger financial sustainability, and leveraging resources to achieve longer-term strategies. Accordingly, the board of trustees will seek an individual with the requisite skills, abilities, and track record that comport with its sense of overall direction for the future.

The board of trustees would like to identify a search firm to provide services as more fully described in Section 4 below. This agreement is non-exclusive, and the board of trustees reserves the right to continue to identify candidates independently of any successful proposer. Any candidates identified by the board of trustees at the time of the award will be disclosed to the successful proposer.

To assist this process, the board has engaged the services of [Consultant] to provide overall advice and counsel to the board of trustees. It is expected that the successful proposer will work cooperatively with [Consultant].

2. Term of Contract

Agreements entered under this RFP shall be effective on the date when executed and shall continue until [Date], unless terminated or extended.

3. Instructions for Proposers

- a. The board of trustees reserves the right to conduct discussions with proposers, to accept revisions of proposals, and to negotiate price changes. During this discussion period, the board will not disclose any information derived from proposals already submitted or from discussions with other proposers.
- b. Those who submit proposals that meet the selection criteria and are deemed to be the most advantageous to the board of trustees may be asked to give an oral presentation to a selection committee.
- c. The award will be made to the responsible proposer whose proposal is determined to be the most advantageous to the board of trustees based on the evaluation factors set forth in this RFP. Price, although a consideration, will not be the sole determining factor. The board of trustees reserves the right not to make any award under this RFP.
- d. If you have any questions about technical information concerning this RFP, please contact [Board or Committee Chair].



4. Scope of Work


The search firm selected by the board shall report directly to the chair of the board, [Name], and shall be expected to provide the following services:

- a. The development of a recommended approach for recruiting, screening, and evaluating candidates (search methodology).
- b. Active outreach and solicitation of individuals with superior qualifications to encourage them to become part of the pool of prospects, including but not limited to contacts with potentially qualified women, racial and ethnic minority individuals, and candidates with a variety of experience outside academia. This activity may range from the circulation of announcements in professional journals to extensive personal contacts with prospective candidates.
- c. Maintain all applications, resumes, and related materials in a manner that is consistent with the requirements of [State] and federal law and that is designed to preserve the confidentiality of all prospects for the position.
- d. Convene meetings and engage in active and ongoing interaction throughout all stages of the recruitment and selection process with members of the board and its search & screening committee.
- e. Prepare and present interim progress reports to the board as requested.
- f. Facilitate board interviews of final candidates and assist in finalizing the terms and conditions of employment for the successful candidate if requested to do so.
- g. Conduct reference and background checks.
- h. Contact media representatives as requested.

5. Proposal Requirements and Evaluation

Proposals should comply with the following requirements:

- a. Provide a narrative description of the proposer's capacity to provide these services and the location and phone number of the office that will coordinate this activity.
- b. Provide a complete list of higher education clients for whom the proposer has conducted presidential searches in the past three years, including the name, address, and phone number of the primary contact person for each client.

- 
- c. Describe the proposer’s ability to contact prospects whose qualifications for this position are known to the proposer.
 - d. Provide the names and background summaries of the individuals who will perform these services at each phase of the process.
 - e. Provide an assurance of the proposer’s ability to complete the required tasks within the stated time frame.
 - f. Describe how the proposer will accommodate [State] and federal laws and board policy relating to topics such as equal opportunity employment.
 - g. Provide an explanation of the fees the proposer intends to charge. Additional costs, like travel, should be identified as a “Not to Exceed” number.

PROPOSAL CERTIFICATION

(Date)

The undersigned certifies that to the best of his/her knowledge:

1. No officer or employee of [Search Firm] has, or has a relative who has, a substantial interest in any contract award pursuant to this proposal.
2. The firm is not currently debarred, suspended, or proposed for debarment by any [State] or federal entity. The undersigned agrees to notify the board of trustees of any change in this status, should one occur, until such time as an award has been made under this RFP.
3. If awarded a contract under this RFP, the undersigned agrees to furnish services in accordance with the Scope of Work.

(Firm)

(Address)

(Signature)

(Telephone)

(Print Name)

(Fax Number)

(Print Title)

(Email Address)

(Federal Tax ID Number)



■ **Suggested questions for interviewing search firms:**

First off, we would like to thank you for developing such a strong proposal for our search. You should know that yours is one of a few we are considering. We hope to make the final decision soon, and we will get back to you shortly.

1. What other searches are you currently working on? Naturally, we would like your undivided attention to our search.
2. We have shared with you a draft copy of the “Search Blueprint.” While it is not final, it does reflect the current thinking of the board of trustees with respect to the kind of person we are looking for in our next president. What is your overall reaction to the “Search Blueprint?”
3. As you can tell, we do not want our next president to be just another academic. Where do you go to find the kind of candidate we need, one with management expertise first and academic credentials second? Do you look outside academe?
4. Do you have any questions about what precisely we are looking for in the new president?
5. What is your advice on the makeup of the search & screening committee? We are deciding between a committee composed entirely of board members versus a more representative approach. Do you have any counsel about this issue?
6. Based on your sense of the market right now, what kind of salary range are we looking at in the new president’s compensation package?
7. One definition of “excellence” is the extent to which the institution adds value to the student; what is your view of that?
8. We did not note the concept of a “guarantee” in your proposal, yet we are aware that your firm has included a guarantee in the recent past. Is it still included?

9. Protocol for Checking References

Name and Title of Reference: _____ Date: _____


“I am [Name] from the [Institution Name] Board of Trustees. You were listed as a reference for [Candidate Name], who is a candidate for the presidency of our institution. I am calling to ask a few questions about this person. Do you have a few minutes?”

1. In what context do you know [Candidate Name]? For what type of work did you two engage? **[Probe for the duration and extent of the relationship.]**
2. Let me tell you a bit about our institution and the kind of leader we seek. **[Explain and secure a sense of the reference’s understanding.]**
3. What is your level of confidence that [Candidate Name] can handle the duties of president as we have defined them? Can you cite any specific examples? **[Probe for strengths, commitment, follow-through.]**
4. If you were in a position to employ this individual, would you have any concerns or issues that the candidate would need to address?
5. We appreciate your candid responses; they are most helpful. Are there any other questions you might have or any other thoughts about the candidate you would be willing to share?

10. Questions to Ask During Finalist Interviews

For several years, I have been collecting the questions that have been asked of candidates of presidencies of American colleges and universities. These questions come from board interviews of candidates for the presidency of 27 public and private institutions over a period of 20 years.

A pattern emerges from analyzing these questions. They typically fall into two categories: a **generic** set of questions, which appear to be more or less common to most searches, and a **specialized** set of questions, which are clearly unique to the current issues of a particular institution at a particular time. The generic questions raise fundamental issues about a candidate’s educational philosophy, style, and ways of thinking, and candidates ought to be able to articulate with some conviction their answers to these questions. The specialized questions, on the other hand, relate either to some current, hot-button



issue that divides the campus (or the board), or to the “pendulum theory,” in which the institution is looking for the opposite characteristics of those perceived to be associated with the predecessor. Thus, the candidate will need to do appropriate homework in order to anticipate the kinds of specialized questions that will likely surface in the interview. Take a dim view of candidates who have not done their homework.

■ Examples of generic questions

1. ***The Opening Question.*** Tell us something about your background and related experience. Why do you wish to become president of [Institution Name]? Tell us about yourself, your background. How did you get to where you are? Tell us the reasons why you are interested in the presidency of [Institution Name], and why do you think you are qualified for this position? Our procedure is for the candidates to give us an opening statement about themselves, their background, and their interest in this position; then we will open it up to questions by the board members and conclude with answering their questions.
2. What do you perceive as the critical issues facing higher education in the next five-to-ten years?
3. Tell us about your management style. What is your consultative style? Provide some examples of your leadership style in working with [faculty, staff, students, the board, the legislature, alumni, donors, the community, other stakeholders].
4. Do you think you have enough experience in all areas of higher education to be president?
5. What is your experience in [planning, budgeting, physical plant, fundraising, etc.]? OR: Explain the process you would use in [planning, budgeting, physical plant, fundraising, etc.].
6. How long would you serve as president? OR: How long should a president serve?
7. A president must of necessity deal with many publics—students, faculty, board, donors, alumni. What is your view of the relationship of the president to the various publics and your qualifications for such dealings?
8. How do you understand our mission, and how do your plans to strengthen our institution align with this mission?



■ Examples of specialized questions

1. How would you handle our enrollment decline?
2. For the past 12 years, the president of this university has had an open-door policy for students and faculty. Would you continue this policy?
3. The cost of college has risen tremendously over the past decade. What will you do to ensure that our institution remains affordable?
4. Discuss how collective bargaining and collegiality can coexist.
5. Should students be subject to penalties for off-campus activities?
6. What are your thoughts on the role of free expression and academic freedom on campus? How would you handle a disruptive protest surrounding a controversial speaker?
7. Should vice presidents go with the president to board meetings?
8. What should the role of research be at our institution?


NOTE: *The candidate's motivation for seeking your presidency is a critical issue. Many candidates know what they want to be, but do not know what they want to do.*

11. Negotiating a Contract

Once the board has decided on a new president, it is time to negotiate a contract with the successful candidate. It is strongly recommended that the terms and conditions of the contract be negotiated and agreed to **prior to** the announcement of the decision. The reason for this brief delay should be obvious: Once a decision has been announced, it puts both the candidate and the board in awkward positions about specific terms. What if the two parties cannot come to a mutual decision? Does a gap in understanding require a new search or, perhaps, selection of a second choice?

All employment contracts should be written by the legal counsel to the board, not by the search firm. The search firm should not be involved in negotiation with the candidate.

In addition to all the standard terms and conditions of the agreement—length of term, compensation, evaluation, etc.—two additional matters deserve special attention:

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- *Tenure.* Some candidates will request that, in addition to appointment as the president, they be granted tenure in an academic department. For some candidates, this is a symbol of their role as “president of the faculty of the institution.” Still other candidates see this as a retreat right in the event that the presidency does not go well. In either case, it is wise for the board to consult with the particular academic department involved to secure its understanding of the relationship.
 - *Exit Strategy.* Although we enter into an employment contract at the outset with high hopes and positive expectations, there are occasions when a parting of ways is necessary. Upfront clarification of such matters as buyouts and/or severance pay should be contemplated and decided now, not when it is too late for reasoned discourse.

12. Ensuring a Successful Transition


Congratulations! Your institution is embarking on a new era. Within the next few weeks, you will call a new president to lead the institution, to effect needed change, and to achieve new levels of excellence.

No president, however talented or capable, can operate at such high expectations without help. Wise leaders call upon trusted assistance from others who can be relied on to provide advice, coaching, and mentorship in key areas that comport with the institution’s most pressing needs.

What is the role of the board of trustees with respect to the president? Focusing on policy, not administration, the board should simultaneously charge the new president with responsibility and support him or her going forward. The next president will inherit an institution that is at once strong and at the same time challenged. The board and the new president will have already identified certain tasks that have to be performed to advance the institution. Some of these tasks are immediate and will require early attention in the first six months. Other tasks are important and will need to be accomplished within the first year. Still other tasks are longer-term in nature but must be a part of the president’s agenda.

Because the board of trustees is heavily invested in the success of the new president, it is incumbent on key members of the board to share with the new president the expertise that they bring to the table from their own extensive experiences.

It is proposed that one or more task forces be established on an extraordinary, transitional basis to work directly with the new president during the first six months of the term to



accelerate the success that both the board and the president expect. This fast-track approach is designed not to micromanage day-to-day operations, but to share, through coaching and advising, the accumulated wisdom of trustees in a trusting, informal format. This approach is seen as saving the new president valuable time in achieving that threshold of awareness about the institution and the community that would normally take years to achieve. Each transitional task force could be composed of two-to-four members of the board who would volunteer for this service, agree to meet and confer with the president and possibly the cabinet, share specific, helpful insights that would round out the president's understanding of the "lay of the land," and would sunset at the end of six months.

The likely benefits of implementing transitional task forces include the following:

1. The new president is welcomed and supported with specific counsel proximate to his or her most immediate tasks.
2. The new president can move more quickly to accomplish the many other duties associated with the office.
3. The board members can establish more trusting working relationships with the president, a circumstance of real value to the institution.
4. Participating board members will feel even more heavily invested in the institution and its success.

Conclusion

We hope this guide helps you navigate the complex route to selecting the right president for your institution. Your engaged service as trustees is essential to the success of American higher education.

Best wishes going forward!





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