

Important Considerations for CAC Boards in Making Executive Director Hiring Decisions

UNIQUE ASPECTS OF CAC MODEL vs. TYPICAL NON-PROFIT IMPACTING EXPECTATIONS OF AND DEMANDS ON DIRECTORS

- CACs by definition are integrally connected to their many, requisite Partner Agencies. These Partners represent a diverse collection of disciplines with equally diverse cultures that can require continual relationship assessment and cultivation.
- The work of the CAC is directly integrated with the criminal and civil legal systems, creating a myriad of potential liabilities that sometimes make seizing opportunities for otherwise creative approaches challenging.
- The very issue of child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, remains a difficult and delicate area to which to draw interest, attention and active involvement – all of which are so vital to the existence of a non-profit.

As a result of these unique characteristics that are so core to the CAC model, special considerations need to be taken when facing the task of hiring a local CAC director. Boards conducting a search for a new director/CEO should consider posing some of these challenges to candidates, during the interview process, in an effort to gain insight into how effectively they might function in the event they are hired to take the reins of the organization.

- **Maintaining the Team/Partner Agency Relationships**
 - These relationships must be developed and maintained at a multitude of levels within each agency, requiring inordinate skills in areas like diplomacy, mediation, negotiation, etc.
 - The CAC has full responsibility for ensuring effective team collaboration yet no official authority whatsoever over any of the agencies or their respective personnel.
 - Each agency brings its own unique culture, politics and degrees of bureaucracy to the mix so strategies that are successful with one may be disastrous with others.
- **Facility Issues**
 - Partner agency personnel may co-locate or “live” in your building but the Director has little actual authority over their activities while they are there.
 - Each agency presents with its own unique needs, demands and expectations regarding workspace and work environment.
 - The confidential nature of work conducted at a CAC creates certain barriers to the traditional opportunities non-profits typically employ to invite the public, funders, media, etc. into the facility to tell their story.
- **Board Issues**
 - By statute, CAC Boards are comprised of sometimes “strange bedfellows” mixing partner agency representatives with community-at-large members. In addition, there is an expectation (state and national standards) that a CAC Board be representative of the population of the county or counties it serves – taking into account cultural and geographic diversity issues that preclude a homogenous Board of like individuals who share expectations, values, life experiences, social contacts, perspectives and needs. Board management and development is a huge part of the Director’s responsibility and these unique Board configurations can present enormous challenges.

- CAC model and child abuse issues are complex by nature, often making it difficult to engage Board members and empower them to effectively serve as spokespersons for the organization out in the community.
- **Staff Issues**
 - CAC staff, in centers that co-locate, must blend effectively with employees of outside agencies but are often held to different policies and expectations, creating tension and sometimes impacting productivity.
 - CAC direct service staff deal with heartbreaking stories of horrific abuse of children on a regular basis – challenging a Director to find ways to support and protect staff and ensure their wellness. Retaining qualified staff in these very specialized positions is a unique challenge in and of itself. Dealing with the secondary trauma they inevitably experience takes a special skill set.
 - Recruiting staff that can meet the challenges, be trusted in the confidential environment that a CAC presents, and stay emotionally healthy over time is especially difficult when competing with other non-profits or the for-profit world where “easier jobs” or “better compensation” are the reality.
- **Effectively Marketing/Promoting the Organization to the Community**
 - The issue of child abuse remains distasteful and therefore difficult for the public-at-large to focus on and talk about.
 - The complexity of the CAC model makes it difficult to effectively and accurately explain in the traditional “sound bites” utilized in traditional marketing campaigns.
 - Confusion with CPS and CASA reigns.
 - Confidentiality and ethical concerns create barriers to typical marketing and publicity strategies. CACs can not ethically provide a “poster child” to market their services or the benefits of the services they provide. Creative approaches must be developed and implemented.
- **Fundraising Issues**
 - Limited grant opportunities exist for CACs, in part due to the nature of the work and its cross-over with government agency activity (investigations, interviews, etc.).
 - Private funders often struggle with the complexity of the model and the distastefulness of the very subject.
 - Traditional “outcome” expectations of many funders are especially difficult for CACs – ethical concerns preclude traditional “research” that would compare child victims you serve vs. child victims you do not; confidentiality issues prevent CACs from “following” these children for 10 or 20 years to see how they fare, etc.

Special Considerations When Transitioning from Founding/Long Standing Successful E.D./CEO

- Boards often seek to find a candidate who is “like” the leader they are losing. While in some instances, this might be a reasonable approach, it is likely that, in fact, the organization is in a very different place than when the initial hire of the out-going director was made – larger staff, larger budget, different services, established and respected in the community. If this is the case, the skill set needed at this time might be very different than that of the exiting director.
- Expecting a new hire to be a duplicate of the exiting director can sometimes inadvertently set the new hire up for failure, as it is generally impossible to step in and replicate a popular, successful director. A new hire must be supported in putting their own stamp on the position but Board oversight is needed to ensure the new hire isn’t creating change for the sake of change rather than respecting the organization’s core values and strategic goals.
- The overall management staff structure may need to be assessed to determine whether or not a restructure might make sense, especially when envisioning a reality without the longtime director at the helm. Such a change can open many new and different possibilities in regard to what the Board might be looking for in its new hire.

Hiring from Within vs. Bringing in an Outside Candidate

- This is one of the more difficult decisions Boards must make when faced with a transition in the E.D./CEO position. There are advantages to both hiring from within and recruiting an external candidate to take the reins of the organization. The Board should be prepared to explore the advantages of each approach before making any final decisions in this regard.
- The Board should first explore whether or not there are viable candidates currently on staff who are interested in being considered for the position and who either have the necessary talents and skills or who have demonstrated an ability to grow into the new position within a reasonable period of time and with appropriate Board support. This approach would allow the organization to benefit from a candidate who understands the complexities and who, hopefully, already has strong relationships with partner agency personnel and key stakeholders.
- If hiring from within, however, consideration should be given to the candidate’s ability to successfully transition to the leadership role, overseeing staff with whom they may have a long standing relationship as peers.
- Hiring an external candidate can offer its own set of advantages such as (1) Avoiding possible conflict among multiple internal candidates who might otherwise find themselves pitted against one another in an effort to secure the E.D. spot; (2) Transitioning a current staff member from the role of peer to role of leader; (3) Providing a totally new and fresh perspective and approach for the organization; (4) Providing outside experiences and new contacts to the organization for the future.
- When hiring an external candidate, it will be important to remember that the learning curve for new hires from outside the “CAC world” is inevitably steep, given the many complexities and nuances of this role (see earlier in this report for specific challenges). Bringing in a new person from the outside to lead the organization requires a strong commitment from the Board to be actively engaged in providing support and direction as the new person navigates this steep learning curve. The Board needs to be able and willing to dedicate the extra time and effort that will be needed in order to ensure the new director’s success.

- If current management staff members are *not* being seriously considered for the lead position, the Board needs to be clear about this at the outset and be willing to explain the reasoning behind their decision. Telling them that they are “too valuable” in their current position can sometimes backfire if the individual has a strong desire to advance professionally and within the organization.
- If an internal candidate is considered a serious candidate and included among finalists for the position but is not eventually named to the position, there is always the risk of hard feelings and a tendency – albeit typically a subconscious one – to undermine or sabotage the new director/CEO who “beat them out” for the position. Some organizations have proactively addressed this threat by restructuring the internal candidate’s current position to include a greater level of responsibility, higher salary and/or benefits, and possibly a new title that demonstrates the value they bring to the organization.
- Many Boards feel an obligation to conduct an external search but also to leave the door open for internal candidates to apply. However, the message the internal candidate often takes away is, “*If you were really interested in me and considered me a serious candidate, you wouldn’t be looking for something better elsewhere.*” If the internal candidate is eventually hired, they often question whether or not they really have the confidence and support of the Board or if, indeed, the Board simply couldn’t find what they were really looking for externally. Contrary to popular opinion among many Boards, internal and external candidates cannot, truly, be considered equally – the internal candidate has history with the organization and the Board has a far greater familiarity and knowledge about an internal candidate that they lack about external candidates. This can manifest itself as a positive or a negative for any candidate. Often, Boards struggle to see an internal candidate objectively and can only see them in the position they currently hold, unable to allow that they might act differently if placed in a leadership role.

Use of an Interim Director During the Transition Process:

- Naming an interim director is often a necessary step – particularly if the exiting director is unable to remain in his or her position until a permanent hire can be made.
- If a current staff member (internal) is to be named the Interim Director, it is important to clarify whether or not they are or could be a serious candidate for the position on a permanent basis. The employee deserves to know if in serving as Interim they are, in fact, being “tested” to see if they are a potential candidate for the permanent position.
- If a current employee serves as Interim Director but is not a candidate for the position on a permanent basis, the period of time they are in the Interim Director position should be kept to a minimum. The longer they are at the helm, the more difficult it will be for them to turn leadership over to a new hire and return to their old position, in which they must answer to this new person who will likely want to enact changes the former Interim may or may not agree are sound.
- Keep in mind that use of an Interim Director – internal or external – is a stressful period of time for the rest of the staff. They have to adjust to a new leadership approach and style, all the while knowing this is temporary and that soon they will have to go through it all over again with the permanent new hire.
- Use of an external Interim Director – someone who is not currently employed by the organization and someone who is not being considered for the position on a permanent basis – can be beneficial under certain circumstances:
 - This can allow staff, Board and the community an opportunity to “get used to the idea” of the organization operating under the direction of someone *other than* the founding/long standing director who has recently left the organization. The more beloved the exiting director is, the more a brief period of “transition” might be beneficial.

- An external Interim – with the appropriate expertise and experience – can come in and conduct a comprehensive assessment of the organization and possibly provide the Board with recommendations about viable changes or transitions the organization might need to consider as they navigate the change in leadership. This is especially true if the organization has not gone through a comprehensive assessment in recent years and/or if there have been multiple incidences of turnover in the director position in recent years.
- An external Interim can – with the Board’s support and direction – take some of the difficult actions (i.e. staff structure changes, budget cuts, firing problem employees, etc.) that might be needed without fear of how these actions will impact their relationships with remaining staff and other stakeholders within the organization. The new, permanent director can then come in with a clean slate, a strong foundation and focus on moving the organization forward.
- A Board needing assistance and direction in the search and hiring process can often benefit from a professional Interim Director with experience and expertise in this regard.

Other Tips/Considerations:

- Make sure the entire Board is actively engaged in open communication, ensuring a shared understanding of the needs of the organization, the priorities established regarding the search and hire process, the timeline and deadline for completing the process, and what role each Board member is expected to play in this process.
- Board leadership may need to be prepared to remain in officer positions longer than their typical terms in order to ensure consistency and continuity for the organization during the transition period.
- All key stakeholders should be kept informed of the Board’s plans for the transition. This is particularly true in regard to Partner Agencies and funders at the local level, and CACTX and other related associations and funders at the state level.
- Keep the staff informed about the Board’s plans, process and timelines for conducting the search and making a hire. The transition will impact their lives on a day-to-day basis more than anyone else. Uncertainty in this regard leads to stress and undue anxiety that can be disruptive and have long term effects that could seriously undermine the efforts of the new director, once a permanent hire is made.