



Healthcare Case Study

Regional Family Services Organization
Rochester, NY



Background Information



Lead Recruiter

Jill Knittel | President & CEO

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Notable Attributes

HISTORY | 20-year-old regional NFP organization

SIZE | \$5,000,000 Organization

SERVICES PROVIDED | Nonprofit focused on intervention and prevention of child abuse

CLIENT BASE | Children and Families

CULTURAL IMPACT | Rochester, NY

Search Context

The positions we worked on included:

- Chief Executive Officer
- Director of Mental Health
- Sr. Manager of Family Services

Position Details

Here's why each role is important:

Chief Executive Officer: The nonprofit's third CEO since its inception faced a critical need to address emerging mental health challenges within the community. The search committee prioritized candidates with strong expertise in governmental relations and the ability to lead a multi-disciplinary team effectively.

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Director of Mental Health: This newly created position was established in response to the growing mental health needs of children and families experiencing trauma. Previously, many mental health services were outsourced. By bringing this role in-house, the organization significantly expanded its capacity to meet the critical needs of the families and children it serves.

Sr. Manager of Family Services: This newly created role was designed to coordinate family service offerings, ensuring that resources are consistent, accessible, and effectively communicated to families at every stage of their engagement with the organization.

Challenges Faced

Firm Challenges

The client faced several internal challenges in their hiring process:

Skill Set Needed: All positions required extensive experience in trauma-informed care. The CEO role, in particular, called for a dynamic leader capable of being the “face” of the organization, while also embracing change and driving growth. This was essential given the ever-evolving landscape of childhood trauma, which demands innovative and varied solutions.

Labor Market: The labor market presented challenges across all searches, particularly for the Director of Mental Health and Senior Manager of Family Services roles. Certifications in a small, regional market were in high demand, making it critical for my team to proactively identify and engage passive candidates with the necessary qualifications.

Cultural Fit Requirements: Despite having fewer than 30 employees, the organization operates as part of a multi-disciplinary team of over 50 professionals, including law enforcement, CPS workers, and medical staff, all collaborating under one roof. The CEO role required a leader capable of exerting influence without direct supervisory authority—an essential but uniquely challenging skill set to find.

These factors collectively added complexity to the recruitment process, necessitating a highly tailored strategy to successfully attract and secure the right talent for the organization.

Search Strategy

Board Relationship

The recruitment process involved close collaboration with the Search Committee of the Board at every stage. Weekly status reports were integral to maintaining clear and consistent communication throughout the search. Once a pool of qualified candidates was identified, the first round of interviews was facilitated with the search committee, accompanied by suggested interview questions, evaluation tools, and ongoing guidance to ensure an effective and seamless process.

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With experience as a Board Member and Board Chair at various nonprofit organizations, the search process is approached from a unique perspective. Viewing the search through the lens of a board member allows for providing real-time guidance and valuable input to the search committee, ensuring alignment with organizational needs and priorities.

Research & Planning

Multiple sourcing methods were employed to identify candidates. We leveraged our extensive network of thousands of professionals across the country, utilized LinkedIn Recruiter to send messages and pinpoint potential candidates, and tapped into our network of previous and former candidates for referrals. Throughout our conversations with candidates, transparency was a priority. We made it a point to understand their individual needs, strengths, and what they sought in their next leadership opportunity.

Candidate Sourcing

We employed multiple methods for candidate sourcing. Our approach included leveraging an extensive network of thousands of candidates across the country, utilizing LinkedIn Recruiter to send messages and identify potential candidates, and networking with former candidates for referrals. When engaging with candidates, we prioritized transparency, aiming to understand their individual needs, strengths, and what they were seeking in their next leadership opportunity.

Screening & Evaluation

Our candidate assessment process began with thorough due diligence to fully understand the Search Committee's needs. All candidates underwent a comprehensive screening process, including a phone interview, written interview, and video interview. This rigorous approach ensured that only the most suitable candidates were presented, enabling the search committee to use their time efficiently and schedule interviews accordingly.

Execution

Timeline

The average time to complete a CEO search for a nonprofit organization typically ranges from 90 to 120 days. To avoid delays, we prioritize scheduling the search committee's calendars well in advance. Recognizing that board members of nonprofit organizations often work full-time, it is especially important for our team to alleviate the administrative burden of the search, ensuring a smooth and efficient process.

Communication

I maintained regular communication with the Chair of the Search Committee, providing weekly status reports to the entire committee at the end of each week. Additionally, I frequently communicated via phone or video calls throughout the week to discuss candidate feedback, offer negotiations, and track the progress of the search. Being accessible to the search committee is always my top priority, which often meant engaging in off-hours and weekend conversations.



Outcome

The CEO has been with the organization for over two years, during which time she has significantly grown the organization, including leading a complete rebranding effort. Having experienced our search process as a candidate, she engaged us to conduct two additional searches: Director of Mental Health and Senior Manager of Family Services.

CEO:

PhD with a strong background in trauma-informed care, extensive experience in governmental relations, and 20 years of leadership experience. A highly effective influencer.

Director of Mental Health:

Licensed social work professional with strong leadership and management experience, as well as a background in interdisciplinary team leadership.

Sr. Manager, Family Services:

MS, PhD candidate, with substantial experience in behavioral health and clinical settings.

Lessons Learned

Key Takeaways

Not all nonprofit organizations are the same, and it was crucial to fully absorb the organization's strategic plan in order to communicate it effectively to prospective candidates. Understanding the unique needs and goals of each organization I work with, as well as the specific requirements for the incoming CEO, is essential to the success of the search.

A key takeaway from this process was the trust our team built with the new CEO. She recognized how deeply we understood the organization, which made engaging us for two additional searches more efficient. Because my team already had a strong grasp of the organization's culture and needs, these searches were completed more quickly than typical.

Best Practices

Here are some innovative strategies and best practices that were particularly effective during this search:

Market Research & Analysis

Deep Dive into Local Market Dynamics: Understanding the talent pool, industry trends, and the local nonprofit landscape was essential for each search.

Competitive Landscape Assessment: My team conducted compensation studies, as we do for every search, to offer compensation guidance and ensure that the organization could present competitive offers.

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Customized Outreach Strategies

Localized Messaging: We customized recruitment messaging to resonate with candidates within the specific industry and with the required skill sets. By gaining a deep understanding of the organization's culture, my team was able to present the organization from a diverse cultural perspective, which helped engage a broader pool of candidates for evaluation.

Candidate Experience

Clear Communication: Communication with active candidates is just as crucial as it is with the search committee. Since the final candidates for these searches were evaluating multiple offers, it was essential for my team to maintain open lines of communication, being readily available to address questions, concerns, and any other needs throughout the process.