

# WISE HIRING

BY VIRGINIA PECKHAM

ILLUSTRATION BY CHARLES SLACKMAN

## Foundation executives share what they've learned about finding the right person for a job.

In looking for new staff, you don't want to be too sanguine, but neither do you want to find yourself paralyzed by the importance of the task. While it is often very time-consuming, there are systematic ways to go about it.

Most important: use your networks. As executive director of the Cleveland Foundation, Steven Minter is always on the lookout for talented people. He says:

"During the course of the year you observe a lot of different people, and you build up a network of people that you have a great deal of respect for. When the time comes that you're thinking about filling a job, you work your network to get references."

Of course, excellent people come out of nonprofits. Barbara Bryan, executive director of the New York Regional Association of Grantmakers (NYRAG), believes they are the best source. "A lot of these people have been right there on the front lines," she says. "They know what the issues are and they're excited to inform the grantmaking process with their knowledge. But it does take a certain kind of person to switch gears."

Jane Morrison, a partner in the search firm Phillips Oppenheim in New York City, agrees: "I see people coming from grassroots organizations thinking, 'Wow! I've got \$5 million to spend on issues that I've been fighting for so long,' not realizing that now it's different. Suddenly they find they can't tell people how to spend the money. They can only guide them.

"There's a certain kind of person who works well in

the philanthropic community— somebody who is comfortable both on the grassroots level and in the academic world. They have to have a conceptual way of thinking, and they also have to be able to manage."

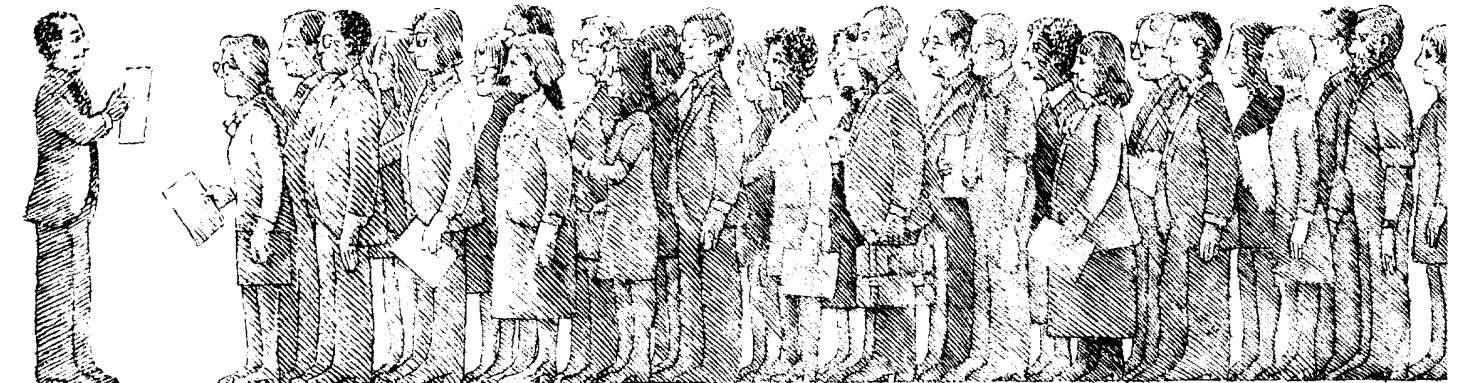
Advertising in the local newspapers usually produces floods of resumes, but yields very few candidates who come close to what you want. Advertising in publications in the areas your foundation funds can sometimes reach good candidates.

Your local regional association of grantmakers (RAG) is an invaluable source of suggestions and contacts. Most RAGs post job descriptions in their offices, and many list job opportunities in their newsletters. An exciting new development made possible by the Council on Foundations' Regional Initiative is a project to connect the RAGs to each other and the Council by electronic mail. Networking for foundation jobs will take on new meaning once this philanthropic superhighway is in place.

If a foundation is serious about bringing diversity to its staff, it must search far and wide. "In New York, at least, it's been our experience that college-educated white people tap into a lot of existing networks and seem to have more ears to the ground," says Madeline Lee, executive director of the New York Foundation. "They seem to have more 'uncles in the business.' So you have to let the process take longer. In all the cases of the terrific minority people we've interviewed, they were without exception not among the first resumes we got."

It can be a mistake to cut off a search too soon. It's a good idea to see as many people as possible in the first round of interviews. These interviews can be as short as five minutes, and they don't have to be longer than 15 or 20 minutes.

Give careful thought to the questions you plan to ask in interviews. And while it may seem obvious, be sure to ask everyone the same questions, so you will be able to make good comparisons.



Once the candidates have been narrowed down to a few finalists, it is general practice to bring them into the office to see the organization close-up and meet all of the key people. If you ask someone to fly in to an interview, you should pay all travel expenses.

### **Finding a Chief Executive**

Occasionally, a foundation's board of trustees will conduct the search for a new president or executive director, mainly through the networks of people the trustees know in the area or areas that the foundation funds. Most candidates come from nonprofits and universities. Others come from trade associations, government and the private sector.

Usually the trustees will hire a search firm. Many of these firms are skilled at reaching out to new, more diverse groups of candidates. A search firm can also help you find good people who already have a job and might not be reading the want ads.

It can be expensive to interview candidates for a national search, but there are ways to cut costs. When recruiters for Phillips Oppenheim were conducting a national search for the North Carolina-based Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, they found candidates in Indiana, Michigan and Minnesota. To save the foundation travel expenses, Jane Momson interviewed the candidates in Chicago, all in one day. If you do not plan to use a search firm, you might consider hiring someone to help screen applicants.

### **Finding a Program Officer**

Many foundation heads believe it is essential to test candidates' writing skills. David Nee, executive director at the Graustein Memorial Fund in New Haven, Connecticut, gives program officer candidates a writing assignment to take home. "I insist on assigning program people a writing task that mimics the pressures they'll experience on the job, he says. "It's usually four to seven pages with a deadline of a week. I want to know how they do at the level of the workaday document that

carries a lot of strategic freight."

The New York Foundation writing test has caused at least one candidate to withdraw from the race. "We ask finalists to give us a day of their time, for which we pay them," says Madeline Lee. "We give them five proposals—real proposals—and tell them, 'you can only fund three of these proposals. Decide which ones you would recommend and write a memo to explain your choice.'"

### **An Unconventional Approach**

Sometimes it's useful to try something different. The General Mills Foundation in Minneapolis recently instituted a two-year program position called foundation senior fellow. "Foundation staff don't turn over often, and they can get in a rut if they aren't careful," explains Executive Director Reatha Clark King. "We wanted to bring a different kind of voice and experience from what we were accustomed to."

The first hire for this position was a 23-year-old Hispanic woman from Los Angeles, found through the Golden Key Honor Society. "We wanted especially to bring in the youth voice," says King. "And we thought about ethnic diversity. Although I am black, I don't feel I am well informed about the issues surrounding Latino and Native American people. We were also looking for geographical diversity, to better serve the knowledge base of our program.

"The position pays a good salary and has all the benefits of a regular position. I think it's a perfect way to introduce people to philanthropy. It also gives us flexibility—at another time, depending on our needs, we might want to hire a retired person.



## Finding a Financial Person

As always, your networks are your greatest asset in finding financial staff. Nevertheless, many financial officers are recruited to philanthropy from the outside. The New York Foundation found its current financial officer at a seminar, “Should I Seek a Job as a Grantmaker?,” offered four times a year by NYRAG. (Regional associations in New York; Boston; Chicago; Los Angeles and Grand Haven, Michigan also offer free programs introducing jobseekers to philanthropy.) Moreover, with so many large corporations and banks “downsizing,” their out-placement offices could be a good place to post your job description.

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Although the board of trustees is not generally involved in searches for staff other than the chief executive officer, sometimes it makes sense for trustees to interview finalists for this kind of position, since they work more closely with the financial officer than with some other staff members.

Philanthropy appeals to financial people for the same reasons it appeals to anyone else. “These are privileged jobs,” says Madeline Lee. “They can be more creative and flexible than a corporate job. You’re still looking at your spreadsheets and crunching numbers, but now the money is going to improve your community. This can be a tremendous lure.”

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## Finding Minority Candidates Means Using Networks

Just mentioning in the job description that minorities are encouraged to apply won’t automatically give you access to them. Steven Minter, executive director at the Cleveland Foundation says, “When it comes to bringing diversity to your staff, I think you have to be incredibly intentional—it doesn’t just happen. You might find yourself at times having to keep a search open longer than you might prefer.”

“Depending upon the extent of your network, you might think of getting search assistance. I would say that, of the minority program officers we’ve hired, we found half of them through working with networks and half through the search firms.”

For Barbara Bryan, executive director of NYRAG, the search for staff is an opportunity to expand an organization’s network: “You need to make sure that your network includes people of color. Our networks have to include a much wider range of people than the ones we went to school with,” she says. “We want to be sure we’re not leaving out a whole field of candidates.”

Bryan strongly recommends sending the job description to affinity groups—independent coalitions of grantmakers and individuals organized around particular issues, such as Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, the Association of Black Foundation Executives, Hispanics in Philanthropy, Native Americans in Philanthropy, and Women and Foundations/Corporate Philanthropy. Since most of them publish newsletters and maintain close ties to the communities they serve, affinity groups can be a valuable resource for an executive search. A fuller list of these groups is available from the Council on Foundations.

Through trade associations connected with your foundation’s main funding areas you can cast your net over a wider pool of possible candidates. Many post job listings in their publications.