Link: <http://ilnet-ta.org/wp/2017/01/06/tips-for-hiring-an-executive-director/>

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**National Technical Assistance Center for Independent Living**

* [A little about John Heveron](http://ilnet-ta.org/wp/a-little-about-john-heveron/)
* [A little about Paula McElwee](http://ilnet-ta.org/wp/a-little-about-paula-mcelwee/)
* [Technical Assistance and Training for your CIL or SILC](http://ilnet-ta.org/wp/technical-assistance-for-independent-living-networks/)

**Tips for hiring an Executive Director**

ILRU provides technical assistance and training to centers for independent living and statewide independent living councils. Through our years of work providing this support, we have gathered some recommendations to help boards of directors or statewide councils during the transition to a new Executive Director.

* Decide how you will handle the job duties of Executive Director while you search. Will you appoint someone internally to assume all the duties as Interim ED? Will you contract with someone outside the organization as Interim ED? Will the management team be able to continue to operate by splitting up the duties, with occasional board support? (If the last option is used, take special care to establish clear lines of authority for all.)
* If an interim director is appointed from the staff, determine IN ADVANCE whether that individual will be eligible for consideration as the permanent Executive Director.  Be clear why you are making the decision that an internal appointee would not be considered; restricting the individual from applying could be quite unfair to the internal appointee, possibly discriminatory and might cause the person to choose not to serve as interim. If the individual is qualified to be an interim, it is likely the individual is qualified to be hired into the position of Executive Director.
* If the interim does apply for the position, don’t let your familiarity with that person result in less respect. Remember that, with 4 to 6 months experience with any candidate, you will know more about their weaknesses than you typically learn in an interview. Don’t assume an outside applicant will necessarily be better. Ask yourself, how has the organization fared under the interim leadership? Are any of your concerns substantive? Has the quality of services decreased or improved or held steady? What about financial management? Go through the responsibilities for the Executive Director and assess the interim fairly, based on things that really matter to the health of your organization. We have sometimes seen boards choose an outside candidate who interviews very well but is not able to produce the desired results. If your interim is producing the desired results that person deserves serious consideration as a candidate.
* Be systematic and organized in your search and hiring. Follow all your own policies, procedures and bylaws, as well as requirements from external entities such as funders. If you don’t have policies and procedures for hiring, the board should create them as it begins its search. The board should make decisions up front of how the process will proceed, and should document these decisions in board minutes and approved policies. Sometimes the board chair is designated to appoint a search committee. In smaller organizations the executive committee might assume this role. It is important to define exactly what the search committee will do before they begin their work. Some typical search committee duties include:Review the job description and qualifications. Ensure they are clear and complete.
* Review salary range taking the CIL’s budget, the local job market and the expectations for the Executive Director into consideration.
* Determine how the position will be advertised and where. Some CILs choose not to advertise [[1]](file:///D%3A%5C%5CUsers%5C%5COwner%5C%5CMy%20Documents%5C%5CRRCI%5C%5C2020%20ExecutiveDirector%5C%5CTips%20for%20hiring%20an%20Executive%20Director%20%E2%80%93%20IL-NET%20TA.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1)through local newspapers or Craig’s List, for example, to avoid the onslaught of clearly unqualified applicants to sort through. Some instead focus on getting the job announcement to independent living organizations such as NCIL, APRIL, ILRU, the state DSU, the state association of centers, the SILC, and even to those same organizations in other states if you feel you need more exposure. This helps to assure that the target applicants come from within the Independent Living movement and understand IL philosophy and requirements.[[i]](file:///D%3A%5C%5CUsers%5C%5COwner%5C%5CMy%20Documents%5C%5CRRCI%5C%5C2020%20ExecutiveDirector%5C%5CTips%20for%20hiring%20an%20Executive%20Director%20%E2%80%93%20IL-NET%20TA.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn1)
* Set a timeframe for receipt of applications for the position.
* Establish a mechanism for screening out applicants that do not appear to meet the qualifications, and make notes on the reasons they do not meet qualifications in case there are questions later.
* Establish a mechanism for the review of the qualified applicants and how the committee will rate them and then present the top applicants to the board for consideration.
* Establish interview questions.
1. Determine who will conduct initial and final interviews and how the interviews will be conducted. This is a board decision. In a national search, sometimes the top applicants are first interviewed by phone, even if they are local, so the board can narrow down to the top candidates in a fair way.
2. Establish a uniform interview process. The process must be as consistent as possible for all candidates. A good process and standardized questions will help to ensure fairness.
3. Adhere to Rehabilitation Act requirements. The Act requires that more than 50% of the management (decision-making staff) of an organization must be individuals with a disability. 51% of 1 is 1, so if there are no other management staff the Executive Director must be a person with a disability. If there are two management staff, both of them must have a disability to achieve 51% because 51% of 2 is 2. You can calculate the numbers if you have more than two management staff. You must follow these requirements even though anti-discrimination laws do not allow you to ask a person if they have a disability. We suggest that you tell the applicant about the nature of consumer control in CILs, and that one of your interview questions is, “What is your personal experience with disability?” If the candidate has a disability and is a sharp, in-the-know person with good IL philosophy they will disclose their disability if it is not apparent.
4. Secure approval from the Independent Living Administration before making a final offer. Your funding contract gives ILA the authority to determine if the person you hire is qualified. Typically this means that you must contact your program officer and present your candidate and your job description/qualifications for their approval BEFORE you make a final job offer.
5. Adhere to any state‑imposed requirements. The Designated State Entity that oversees your grants, even if you don’t get money from them directly, can place additional requirements on your hiring process. CILs should assure that their hiring policies and procedures, and the written job description and qualifications, meet any additional state requirements.
6. Follow fair employment practices. Some organizations have a long history and/or written policies and procedures that support hiring from within as a priority, in keeping with a philosophy of providing leadership development internally. This would typically include a process for internal posting and a designated period during which applications are accepted from “internal applicants,” which could include board or staff. If board members wish to apply, a best practice would be that the board member resign prior to making application, avoiding an appearance of conflict of interest and lessening any sense of obligation board members might have to hire a fellow board member. (How applications from board members will be handled should be addressed in personnel or board policies.) Some organizations, especially small organizations with a very small pool of potential internal candidates, must consider a wider search in order to assure that the hiring process is fair and unbiased.
7. Check references and complete a criminal background check before you make the final offer. Reference checks are sometimes neglected because many mistakenly believe they yield little information, but careful questioning of even those references provided by the candidate will almost always yield very useful information, both for selection and in later providing guidance and direction to the successful candidate. Your insurance carrier or funders may require a criminal background check. Your own policies may also. You are entrusting the funds and assets of the organization to the new Executive Director. Be clear in your correspondence with the candidate that you’ll be doing the background check and then follow through. Make sure to conduct a complete nationwide check, ideally based both on the candidate’s name and background information he or she provides as well as a check based on his or her fingerprints.
8. Make the best but not an unreasonable offer. Back at the beginning of this process the board determined the salary range for the Executive Director. Now you have narrowed down the candidates, you have your top choice, and it is time to make an offer. DO stay within your budget. Sometimes a really great-sounding candidate will attempt to convince you that you can afford to pay them more because they are such a great fund raiser. That may be—and you can consider that at the time of the first evaluation. Too many people are better at talking than at doing, unfortunately. If you have selected an internal candidate, one presently employed in the organization, offer a salary in the same range that you would offer other successful candidates. If they are the best candidate they probably deserve it.
9. Be sure to discuss benefits when the job offer is made. Part of the cost to the CIL and the benefit to the candidate is in the compensation that isn’t reflected in the paycheck. This might include attendance at national conferences, vacation commensurate with experience, or the availability of a vehicle in lieu of paying mileage (especially if the center covers a large geographic area).
10. Consider covering moving costs if the candidate is from another area. Have a budget in mind before offering to do so. Make sure the payment is necessary and reasonable (that is, consistent with actual costs and in line with what other similar organizations in your area have paid). Some organizations require an employee for whom moving expenses are paid to agree that some or all of the payment will be returned (deducted from a final check, for example) if the employee leaves the organization within a few months or a year.
11. Make it clear that you require the E.D. to live in the catchment area you serve, if this is the case. Some centers require this in keeping with their philosophy of representation in the community for the center. Others are comfortable with a commuting Executive Director. Decide in advance which you are. If the director will commute, have a firm agreement about what an acceptable travel distance is. At the same time, it might be wise to have a discussion about your expectations of when you expect the director to be in the office or otherwise engaged in business of the organization, discussing both days of the week and beginning and end of the work day.
12. Put the final offer in writing. You may use a contract or a letter of offer, but make sure that you are clear, in writing, so that there is no confusion later. Have your attorney help you draft the letter or contract. At the least, the attorney should review the document.

**[[1]](file:///D%3A%5C%5CUsers%5C%5COwner%5C%5CMy%20Documents%5C%5CRRCI%5C%5C2020%20ExecutiveDirector%5C%5CTips%20for%20hiring%20an%20Executive%20Director%20%E2%80%93%20IL-NET%20TA.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref1)** APRIL members can post administrative positions such as Executive Director by emailing the announcement to april-elissa@sbcglobal.net. NCIL members can post through an on-line form at <http://www.ncil.org/submit-a-job/>  All CILs can post job openings via email at ilru@ilru.org

**2 thoughts on “Tips for hiring an Executive Director”**

Darma Canter

January 6, 2017 at 8:08 am

Title VII of the Rehab Act required CILs to affirmatively “recruit, hire and promote people with significant disabilities.” Is that still true under WIOA?
The original legislation also made it clear disability and significant disability are different and definable. For the purpose of administering a CIL and serving the disability community, the distinction between diagnosis and disability experience is important. If the leadership doesn’t personally understand the dependence, loss of control or exclusion routinely experienced by people with IL disabilities, they might not understand why change is urgently needed. If they have no experience as a recipient of services dependent on systems of support, they may not know the need for empowerment and peer support.
Independent living is not jargon; independence and self-determination are a continual, re-occurring struggle for people with significant disabilities to live with dignity. Having real knowledge of what it feels like to be a patient, a client, a consumer and vulnerable to the whims of public funding is critical to a CILs advocacy agenda.
No one can deny many people with significant disabilities have gone to college, have professional incomes, and are engaged in community life as a result of IL and the disability rights movement, but …. Demographically the people with the most serve challenges to independence are still stigmatized and marginalized by society. They are also under represented in leading and staffing of our CILs.
Should we be challenging our IL institutions to confront Ableism in our ranks? When Centers prioritize their business interest selecting an Executive Director is that a symptom of Ableism? Is it a fallacy that centers must increase financial resources in order to better serve the disability community? Are centers service providers like other disability charities or are centers community organizers leading change by educating and empowering the base? Are centers non-profit business using public funds to increase their position in the business community or are centers a challenge to a status quo that excludes the disabled?
As usual, Paula, thank you for starting an important discussion!

[Reply](http://ilnet-ta.org/wp/2017/01/06/tips-for-hiring-an-executive-director/?replytocom=1026#respond)

[Paula McElwee](http://ilru.org/)Post author

January 6, 2017 at 10:19 am

The current law states: C (29 U.S.C. 796f to 796f-6).
§ 1329.2
Purpose.

The purpose of title VII of the Act is to promote a philosophy of independent living (IL), including a philosophy of consumer control, peer support, self-help, self-determination, equal access, and individual and system advocacy, in order to maximize the leadership, empowerment, independence, and productivity of individuals with disabilities, and to promote the integration and full inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of American society…