**Interview Advice for a Board of Directors Hiring a new ED or CEO**

**Question Options for Animal Shelter Executive Director ― Board of Directors Interview**

We recommend selecting 10 to 14 questions from the list below. It’s best to select from different categories to cover the broadest scope of skills and experiences needed for this role.

**Openers to help candidate feel comfortable**

* Do you have pets? Tell me a bit about them?
* Just to get to know you a bit, would you tell us briefly about your current pets?

**Determine if candidate researched the organization**

* In your own words, describe [Organization’s Name] mission?
* Why are you passionate about THIS organization and THIS mission?

**Motivation**

* Why do you want to lead [Organization’s Name]?
* What would you hope to accomplish as the Executive Director of [Organization’s Name]?

**Strengths/Weaknesses**

* What are the greatest strengths you bring to this position? And please provide examples of these strengths from your past work.
* What aspects of this role do you think you will find to be challenging and how will you address these challenges?

**Stretching capabilities/learning agility**

* Tell us about a time when an old solution didn’t work. What did you do?
* Tell us about a time in your past where you stepped up to take on substantially greater responsibility or a new challenge that required you to get up to speed quickly.

**Vision**

* What is your vision for [Organization’s Name]?
* As we overcome pet overpopulation in our community our work becomes less about animal sheltering and adoption. What do you see as the future work of [Organization’s Name]?

**Outreach communication**

* What would be your approach to telling the story of the work of [Organization’s Name] to the public, the media and donors?
* Share your past experience with engaging the community with a cause or effort?
* Have you worked with the news media (TV, radio, print)? Public speaking? Please describe related experiences.
* Organizational visibility is key to our ability to be effective and raise money. Tell me about your public speaking experience and any experience you have had with the press?

**Fundraising**

* How does your background prepare you to raise the funds needed to run the organization and sustain our work for the animals?
* Can you talk about your experience with fundraising and development? Describe various kinds of fundraising you have been past of, such as direct mail, online fundraising and cultivating major gifts/donors? Share some of your successes and challenges. If no exp: talk about how you think you would approach this challenge.
* Tell us about your past experiences with fundraising that prepare you for this role?
* How would you approach raising the needed funds to sustain [Organization’s Name]? Are there any potential opportunities that you see?

**Boards**

* What do you expect from the [Organization’s Name] Board of Directors if you get this position? How do you most effectively work with a Board?
* Talk about your past experiences working with boards of directors including challenges and successes you had.
* What do you see as the ideal relationship between the board and the executive director?

**Leadership**

* What is the most significant change that you brought to an organization?
* How do you measure your success as a leader of a humane organization?
* As a leader, you must often build support for goals and projects from people who do not report to you and over whom you have no authority. Tell me about a situation that demonstrates that you can build needed support.
* How do you get your employees (or others) to follow you? Please share an example of this from your past work experiences.
* In your experience, what is the key to developing a good team? Please share an example of how you have implemented this in the past and the results.
* If you become the next Executive Director of [Organization’s Name], how would you approach the job? What would you do in your first 100 days?

**Management Skills**

* How would you begin the working relationship with the team of existing staff members? What are the first steps you would take?
* How do you go about resolving conflict? Can explain how you deal with it and share an example from your past work?
* How do you handle disagreement with subordinates? Can you share an example from the past of how you handled things when a key manager who reported to you had a strong difference of opinion?
* In managing staff, how do you ensure that tasks are completed on a timely basis and standards upheld by your team? Please provide an example from your past experience in managing a staff performance.
* How do you delegate responsibility for an assignment? How do you decide who to choose? What and how do you delegate, and what do you monitor and follow up?
* How would you describe your management style? How much leeway do you give your employees to make decisions? How do you still maintain control and ensure quality performance? Please share an example from your past work.
* What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in guiding and maintaining successful work relationships? Give us an example of how you have made these work for you.
* Give me an example from your past work experiences, about a time when you had an underperforming employee reporting to you. How did you address the situation? Did the employee’s performance improve? If not, what did you do next?
* Have you ever had to terminate anyone? How did you handle that situation?
* Have you ever had to terminate a member of your management team? Tell us about the steps you took leading up to making this decision, the factors you took into consideration and how you handled it.

**Experience/Knowledge of the field**

* What do you see as critical lifesaving programs for dogs and cats that are part of the role of a humane organization? Discuss your knowledge of and any experience with these programs.
* You have been the \_\_*role*\_\_ at \_\_*org name*\_\_, could you tell me about your annual intake numbers? What was your live release rate? Did it change during your tenure? Why or how did that happen?

**Customer Service**

* A woman has come into the shelter to surrender a pet because she does not have enough money to provided needed vet care for an ailment. What would your policy be on this sort of situation and how would you like to see staff handle that discussion?

**Managing Emotions**

* Animals raise a lot of emotion and passion for people including volunteers, staff, donors. Can you give an example from the past that illustrates how you managed an emotionally charged situation?

**Decision-Making**

* Describe your approach to making decisions and solving problems. Why do you do it this way?
* What areas are within your sphere of responsibility in your current position? How do, you make sure that you know what is happening (problems, changes, etc.)?
* How did you a handle a time when you had to make an unpopular decision?
* Name a time when you had to change a decision due to new facts, tell us about it.
* Tell me about a time when an old solution didn’t work. What did you do?

**Budgeting**

* What is your experience managing budgets? What is the largest budget you have managed?
* Tell me about a time when you had to prioritize limited resources? How? What worked and what did not?
* Describe your approach to budgeting for your organization? Please share the strategies you use to make tough decisions, such as when you may have to choose between funding one program and not another?

**Closing**

* Why should we hire you as the next Executive Director of [Organization’s Name]?
* Anything else you would like to tell us? And do you have any questions for us?

**Other**

* Willing to relocate for long distance candidates
* Willing to make a 3 year minimum commitment?
* Please provide three writing samples (if they have experience, examples of fundraising appeal letters, thank you letters, talks they have given to donors, articles, etc. are helpful.)
* Please provide three work-related references

**Remember: It’s unlawful to ask a candidate questions that pertain to:**

* Age
* Race, ethnicity, or color
* Country of national origin or birth place
* Gender or sex
* Religion
* Marital or family status or pregnancy (children, child care)
* Disability/health problems that do not prevent them from doing the job
* Criminal History that does not apply directly to the role

**Questions to Ask References**

When you ask candidates for references, specify that you are looking for references that can speak to their past work performance.

Though references are clearly people the candidate has provided because they anticipate that they will give positive feedback it is well worth the time to call them. Getting valuable information depends upon opening up a dialogue with the individual by asking specific questions.

* In what capacity did you work with this person? And how long?
* How would you characterize your experience in working with this person?
* What positive impact has this person had on the organization?
* What was challenging for this person and how did they overcome these challenges?
* Anything else you would like to share?
* Would you hire or work with them again? Why or why not?

**What to Look for in the Candidate’s Interview Responses**

There are three key factors to consider in making a hiring decision. These are:

* Can the person do the job? (CAN DO factorsinclude basic job requirements)
* Will the person do the job? (WILL DO factorshelp identify motivation and drive)
* Will the person fit into the job environment? (FIT factorstake into consideration several environmental levels in which the person will be required to operate effectively)

**CAN DO** Factors

* Work Experience
* Education
* Technical Skills
* Analytical Skills
* Communication Skills
* Specialized Training

**WILL DO** Factors

* Motivation/Motivators
* Interests
* Goals (professional and personal)
* Drive/Energy
* Reliability / Stability

**FIT** Factors

* Team Orientation
* Independence
* Social Effectiveness
* Interpersonal Style
* Stress Tolerance
* Limitations (travel, availability, location)

The most effective predictor of future performance is past performance. For this reason, asking questions that include asking for examples from the candidate’s experiences can be helpful.

Here’s our thinking regarding what to look for in response to the questions above:

**Motivation/Leadership/Research on the Organization**

Look for drive, energy and enthusiasm. You should feel it in their responses.

* You are not looking for someone who wishes to get into this job to coast comfortably along, you are looking for someone who is driven to do their best and to make the organization the very best it can be. The individual should want to serve the animals and the community with passion and commitment. SO you want to hear passion, enthusiasm and energy in their responses to questions about the organization and their motivation. If they do not have it now, in the interview, it is not going to suddenly appear once they are in the job. Look for an energetic go-getter!
* Someone who wants the job will have done some research into the organization.
* Talking about strategic planning and clarity of goals and messaging – these are promising signs that the individual understands how to get everyone within the organization pulling in the same direction.

**Management**

You are looking for a leader who will be effective as a manager. Things that would indicate this would be:

* Starting out the relationship with staff by talking to each staff member one on one to get to know them. Seeking to learn and understand before changing things. Not good: A “my way or the highway” approach. Equally, someone who is a complete push over will not be effective either. You need someone with a backbone who is also open to new ideas and gets along well with people in general.
* Listen for good examples from the past that demonstrate managing conflict in respectful, skillful ways. Asking questions to gain understanding, active listening, these are good qualities.
* Setting and effectively communicating clear, consistent expectations is one of the keys to successful management. Listen for examples of this. Communication skills need to be strong. The person must be able to give effective respectful feedback. At the same time, they need to be open to ideas and information from staff.
* You want someone who establishes fair practices that include clear expectations, positive reinforcement as well as feedback and opportunities for improvement. At the same time this person needs to be confident and strong enough to address performance issues and move people along when necessary.

**Experience**

Past animal welfare experience is not essential, but the right attitude of continuous learning is important.

* If they are new to the field, have they done any research? If in the field, are they knowledgeable about current best practices? – You want someone who keeps up with the rapidly changing field and is not stuck on the one way they have done things in the past.
* If they have been in the field; You are looking for someone who has demonstrated a track record of lifesaving and improvement. If from another field, you are looking for a track record of innovation, success and high standards.

**Customer Service**

The individual should understand the importance of being friendly, positive and being compassionate to people as well as animals.

* Current best practices in animal welfare and sheltering have moved away from blame and adversarial relationships with the public toward compassion and helping people to keep their pets by providing support – we would be looking for an answer that supported that approach; Doing what can be done to maintain the human animal bond and treating people with respect and compassion .

**Managing Emotions**

* Ideally, you hear an example that demonstrates that the individual has experience dealing successfully with emotionally volatile situations with tact, compassion, sensitivity, sincerity and finesse. Someone who has never dealt with strong emotions in the work place before OR someone who lacks compassion for people or lacks tact and strong communication skills will probably struggle in the role.

**Decision-making**

* You are looking for a person who gathers all the information, and makes a decision – this should not be a protracted process, but should move along in a timely manner. This is about balance: On the one hand, people who make snap decisions without gathering all the facts and salient information are usually not making smart decisions. At the same time you want someone who can make a decision in a timely manner so that opportunities are not lost.

You are looking for a person possessing sound judgment; they can make a decision when it must be done quickly by gathering information quickly, they can change or adjust decisions in the light of new information, can explain why they made a decision, and most importantly, strive to increase buy-in from staff and others by getting their input before they make a decision.

At the same time, people are inspired by principled leadership. So sometimes a good director will make critical calls that speak directly to the mission – for example; will we help animal control with the hoarding case animals? You bet! And we will figure out how to fundraise around it and inspire staff to do what needs to be done.

**Fundraising**

Fundraising is all about building relationships and inspiring people to support the organization. It take energy, enthusiasm and passion to be successful.

* You are looking for someone who has a track record of successful fundraising through multiple strategies. They should know about, or at least be keen to learn about, the full range of fundraising strategies. They should talk about creating a comprehensive development and marketing plan for the organization. Setting goals with due dates or schedule that the team will work – that’s promising. Fundraising is about relationship building, this takes time and effort.
* This is another area where passion and enthusiasm for the cause is critical. People expect the director to be sincerely concerned about dogs and cats and other animals and to be an energetic spokesperson for them.
* Someone who is comfortable with the media and public speaking is a real asset.
* Promising immediate or massive results or relying solely upon personal contacts or any one strategy (rather than a constellation of fundraising strategies) may not be effective and may be a red flag.

**Budgeting**

* Ideally, this person has managed a budget before. Also, ideally, they engage managers and other knowledgeable people in the process, they look at past budgets vs. actual, they consider the organization’s mission, goals and priorities for guidance, they weigh critical needs, including development, marketing/promotion, and staff training. They do not only look at reducing expenses, they look at opportunities to raise funds through donations and other opportunities.