

KDLA Director Hiring Guide

KDLA has prepared this guide to assist the process of hiring a new director.

We recommend that boards devote sufficient time to select the best individual to lead the library. This process generally takes 4-6 months.

This guide includes general principles and best practices and may not be perfectly applicable for your situation. This is for informational purposes only, please contact your legal counsel for interpretations of law and specific questions.

Below you will find information segmented into several sections:

- [Addressing the immediate needs of the library](#)
- [Application and interview process](#)
- [Preferred candidate traits and evaluation of candidates](#)

Addressing the Immediate Needs of the Library

If the outgoing director has given notice, they should review the **Succession Planning Checklist** for further detail to best prepare the board, staff, and their successor for the change. However, that may not always be feasible. In the instance of a sudden director vacancy, there are actions that should be taken by the board and by designated staff.

Immediate Actions of Designated Staff:

When an employee leaves, all library-owned property and work created while in the employ of the library needs to remain with the library. Due to the director's role, there is a larger amount of library property on library grounds and possibly at their home. If the director can follow the **Succession Planning Checklist**, all items and information should be accounted for. However, in the case of a sudden director vacancy, the board or their designee should be prepared to quickly account for all library property including:

- Keys/fobs/codes to access doors, desks, filing cabinets, and storage units.
- Computers and their access codes.
- Phones and their access codes.
- Access to accounts including but not limited to:
 - Director's E-Mail (very important for account recovery & records retention.)
 - Financial Services (Accounting/payroll software such as Quickbooks.)

- Online banking, & benefit portals.
- Governmental (E-Rate, Sam.gov, Dept. for Local Government SPGE Portal.)
- Utilities, social media, and other accounts.

Immediate Board Actions:

As soon as possible, the board should convene to begin the process. If the vacancy is sudden, the board may want to call a special meeting. In that case, it will be necessary to follow the special meeting rules found in the [Kentucky Open Records and Meetings Acts Guide](#).

Because it may take several months before a new director is hired, the appointment of an interim director to administer the library should be one of the board's first priorities.

The interim director is often a current library employee; however, the board can consider someone from outside. By appointing an interim, all parties (staff, the board, the public) know who to turn to when necessary and the library's functions should only be marginally impacted. In rare circumstances, a board may not be able to select an interim. In these cases, more thoughtful communication is needed in adjusting processes.

We recommend you reach out to your regional library consultant for assistance.

If an interim is appointed, the board should:

- Appoint an individual who can carry out the duties and responsibilities of the director and pay them a commensurate salary.
- Announce the interim appointment to the community, to library staff, and to their regional library consultant.
- Be sure to provide the interim director with the assistance needed to carry out operations and services. Additional tasks may be delegated to assure that services do not suffer due to the absence of the interim director from daily library operations.

Application and Interview Process

Below are the major steps that the board will need to undertake or consider during the director hiring process, all of which will be discussed in greater detail:

- Determine whether to hire a consultant to assist with the search.
- Create an overall timeline.
- Update director position description.
- Prepare a job advertisement & create timeline.

- Advertise the position.
- Review applications & select candidates to interview.
- Interview candidates.
- Check candidate references.
- Offer job & negotiate with the preferred candidate.
- Introduce the new director to the staff, key community leaders, and the public.

Hiring Consultants

The director search can be an intensive process that can take several months. As library boards are strictly volunteer positions, they may find that they need assistance in this process. One option is to hire a search firm/director hiring consultant. There are national firms that focus on hiring library directors and several Kentucky-based firms that work with a variety of businesses and non-profits. Although staff at KDLA cannot recommend a particular company, your regional library consultant can provide a list.

Prices can vary greatly, but the board should expect to spend thousands of dollars to hire a consultant.

What a consultant can do for the library:

- Review the job description and offer suggestions.
- Disseminate the job posting to a wider audience.
- Collect and review submissions.
- Conduct screening interviews and schedule interviews.
- Serve as a panelist for interviews if needed.
- Negotiate with preferred candidates as directed by the library board.

If the board believes that these benefits are cost-prohibitive, then a number of these actions can be done “in-house” with a combination of duties split between the board, interim director, staff, and their regional library consultant.

Creating an Overall Timeline

It is helpful to have a discussion on the length of the process. As stated earlier, this process can take over 6 months. The length will be determined by a number of factors, including:

- The breadth of the search.
- The desire of the board to have additional special meetings in a month.
- The viability of the internal candidate pool.

Update Job Description

Any time there is a director vacancy, the director job description should be reviewed. If the prior director has been in the role for a long time or the library has had significant changes, it may necessitate many edits. If possible, have the outgoing director modify it to bring it in line with what they believe are their currently constructed duties. The job description may also be compared against the library's most recent strategic plan to see if the goals are aligned. You may also seek the input of your hired consultant or your regional library consultant from KDLA. We recommend that benefits and a narrow salary range are a part of the job description.

Preparing the Job Advertisement and Creating the Timeline

A job advertisement can be formed entirely from the job description or be an entirely different print or multimedia guide that "sells" the library to applicants.

It may reference information about the library and the community it serves such as:

- Current description of the community including names of communities, cities and libraries.
- Salary and benefits, especially if not clearly listed in the job description.
- Library mission statement.
- Links to relevant library documents (strategic plan, bylaws)
- Any anticipated significant trends or changes.
- Where and how to apply.
- Application deadline.
- Any other pertinent information.

Advertise the Position

If the board decides to hire a consultant, this person will provide suggestions and handle the logistics of the advertising. If the library handles this process internally, the most important considerations are where to advertise and the amount of time the position will be open. The standard length of time for a director posting in Kentucky is 6 weeks. Possible venues to post the job opening are:

- [Kentucky Archives and Jobs List](#) managed by KDLA: Free & most common resource.
- [ALA JobLIST](#): A list that would get more nation-wide applicants. Costs hundreds of dollars to post an ad.
- University of Kentucky School of Library & Information Science LISTSERV.
- Library social media: Another free resource, limited results based on shares by fans of the library's site.

- Local newspaper: Expensive option that may have a narrow return on investment.

Other resources may also benefit your specific library. Reach out to your regional library consultant for suggestions.

Review applications and select candidates to interview

The board needs to determine the makeup of the interview panel by the time the position is open, if not sooner. The interview panel can consist of the entirety of the board; a select committee of board members; or a combination of board members, library staff and outside experts, such as an HR consultant or your regional library consultant from KDLA. If the board prefers to use a committee, then committee members should be appointed by the President or by the process laid out in the library's bylaws.

To go along with the job description and advertisements, the board needs to decide who will compile and disseminate the potential applicants amongst the members of the interview panel. Often this is the interim director or a hired consultant. The Committee (if one is appointed) or Board Trustees will review each résumé received and determine which candidates they would like to interview.

Some criteria to consider while reviewing résumés include:

- Is the résumé or application form readable and well written?
- Did the applicant provide complete information?
- Are there gaps between jobs?
- Has the applicant held many jobs that last only a short time?
- Are the reasons for leaving missing?
- Does the education and work background conform to the job requirements?

Even if an internal candidate has been positioned through succession planning to assume the directorship, it may be best to interview a diversity of candidates to find the best replacement. This also helps demonstrate that the board did their due diligence in hiring the best person for the job. It may also help if there are questions from the community or other stakeholders.

Interview candidates

The interview panel will need to schedule several dates and times to conduct interviews. Whether this panel is a quorum of the board or an appointed committee, they will need to consult their legal counsel to make sure that they are abiding by the [Kentucky Open Records & Meetings Act](#). The panel should, with their legal counsel, review the narrow exceptions to open meetings and should refrain from entering into closed session for

“general personnel matters.”

Further information can be found in the [Preferred candidate traits and evaluation of candidates](#) section.

Check candidate references

The interview panel should delegate an individual to check references. Some groups check references before any interviews are granted. Others wait until a preliminary decision on a candidate is reached. If possible, consider contacting employees the candidate has supervised as well as the candidate’s past and present supervisors. Be prepared for the fact that many organizations may now just verify the dates that the individual was employed. Obtain any requisite permission from applicants to conduct reference checks. Be aware of discrimination laws when probing for information and be sure all information is kept confidential, sharing information with the committee and/or consultant only. Some considerations include:

- Ask about quality and volume of work, specific areas of competence, management style, relationships with the board and staff, and the candidate’s ability to function in stressful situations.
- Capture words and feelings with notes during the conversations (but do not distribute these to others.)
- Listen to what is said as well as what is not said.
- Consider the currency of the information.
- Carefully consider any overly negative responses.

Offer job & negotiate with the preferred candidate

After the panel has completed all interviews and deliberations, they should designate an individual to carry out the next tasks: contacting the preferred candidate and negotiating on salary and benefits, if allowed by the board. The panel should also decide if there are alternate options, if the first candidate declines the offer.

Introduce the new director to the staff, key community leaders, and the public

An optional task, but the board or their designee should, at minimum, inform the staff once an offer has been accepted, especially if it is an external candidate.

Preferred Candidate Traits and Evaluation of Candidates

Although the board may have ideas of the traits they would prefer their future employee to have, there are five basic characteristics that should be evident in a good library director, regardless of the library's size:

- **Common sense:** This characteristic is often overlooked, yet absolutely essential to good leadership. Common sense plays a critical part in policy development and implementation. It determines whether a person is rigid or flexible in library operations and can successfully manage the day-to-day running of the library.
- **Decision-making ability:** The person should be self-confident enough to make tough, informed decisions independently and on the spot.
- **People skills:** Communication skills, fairness, friendliness, empathy, sense of humor and, most significantly, being customer focused are all essential.
- **Vision:** A good director can analyze the library community and the world at large to improve services and recognize opportunities to move the library forward.
- **Integrity:** The individual must demonstrate a commitment to ethical behavior and to the core values of the library profession.

In addition to the above listed characteristics, a good director will have the following skills:

- Financial management skills to develop, implement, and stay within a budget.
- HR skills that show the ability to hire, fire, and manage people effectively.
- Organizational skills and the ability to multi-task.

Evaluation of Candidates

As stated in the previous section, these interviews must comply with Kentucky open meetings laws.

The interview process, whether comprised of one round or several, is still just a period of several hours that will determine the future of the library. Since this time is limited, the panel needs to be very deliberate with the questions asked and the answers sought. Despite the concerns listed above, we encourage the board to limit their questions so that interviews do not exceed two hours. Director interview questions generally are:

- Behavioral or theoretical in nature.
- With few exceptions, require answers of several sentences or more.

- Focused in the areas of:
 - Professional Knowledge
 - Leadership (professional and customer service)
 - Administration/Management (personnel, policy making and governance)
 - Financial
 - Planning (marketing, public relations, programs, and services)
 - Technology and Facilities

Hiring Consultants can assist with questions, as well as your regional library consultant and staff, if needed. No matter how the interview panel crafts their questions, the same initial questions should be asked to all applicants. Follow-up questions are acceptable. Legal counsel should review them to make sure that none are considered illegal, avoiding questions that would gather information that could lead to discriminatory hiring decisions.

Before the interviews, the panel should determine the competencies on which they want to focus and score each candidate. Use a scoring matrix to create an objective tool to support your final choice. Your regional library consultant can provide you with examples.

After the panel completes their portion, provide the applicant an opportunity to ask questions of the panel. At the end of the interview, ask each applicant to sign a release form, permitting you to discuss performance with former employers and other references. Work with your legal counsel to construct a form that protects the library from liability during this process. The panel may also have the applicant sign a release form for a complete background check at this stage or wait until a candidate accepts a conditional job offer.

When the panel concludes interviews, they can deliberate on all candidates. This can be done at the conclusion of the last interview or in a separate special meeting. The panelists can combine their notes/scoring matrices to come to a consensus on the best candidate for the position.