**Guidelines, Interview Script, and Interview Questions for Nonprofit Executive Director**

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# Guidelines and Interview Script and Questions for Nonprofit Executive Director

## 1. Preparation Before the Interview

**A. Define the Purpose**
- Clarify the goal: Is this for a hiring decision, a media article, a board review, or something else?
- Identify key outcomes: What insights do you need from the ED?

**B. Research the Organization and the Interviewee**
- Review the nonprofit's mission, programs, impact reports, and recent news.
- Understand the ED’s background (LinkedIn, bios, press releases).

**C. Develop Interview Questions Thoughtfully**
- Align questions with the job description and the organization’s objectives (e.g., strategy, leadership style, impact).
- Mix open-ended questions with a few factual/clarifying ones.
- Avoid leading or biased questions.
- Stay away from personal, discriminatory, or off-limits questions (see legal notes in section 2).

## 2. Legal Considerations

**A. Avoid Inappropriate/Illegal Questions**
**Do not ask about:**
- Age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.
- Marital or family status
- Religion or political affiliation
- Disabilities or health conditions
- Citizenship or immigration status (unless job-relevant)

**B. Confidentiality**
- If you're recording or taking notes for publication or sharing, get explicit consent.
- Respect any confidential information shared during the interview.

**C. Consent for Use**
- If the interview will be published, ask the ED to sign a release form for quotes, video, or photos.
- Be transparent about how the content will be used and stored.

## 3. During the Interview

**A. Set a Respectful Tone**
- Be punctual, professional, and warm.
- Start with small talk to build rapport, then review the interview scope and purpose.
- Reiterate confidentiality or recording if applicable.

**B. Stay on Track**
- Use your questions as a guide but let the conversation flow naturally.
- Take notes or record with permission, but stay present.

**C. Be Aware of Power Dynamics**
- If you're representing a board, media, or funder, be mindful of how that might affect the dynamic.
- Maintain a respectful and neutral stance.

## 4. Developing Questions: Executive Director Themes to Consider

Below you will find some general questions to ask a candidate. However, the starting point in developing interview questions is to make sure that the interview questions and the job description are in alignment. Find the main points of the job descriptions, then create a set of questions from those.

**Mission & Vision**
- What drives your commitment to this organization's mission?
- How do you measure success?

**Leadership & Strategy**
- What’s your leadership style?
- How do you set priorities or make tough decisions?

**Community Impact**
- What recent initiative are you most proud of?
- How do you ensure programs serve the community effectively?

**Fundraising & Operations**
- What’s your approach to sustainable funding?
- How do you manage organizational growth or challenges?

**Future Outlook**
- What are your key goals for the next 3–5 years?
- What changes do you foresee in the nonprofit sector?

## Sample Interview Script and Questions

\* Be sure all questions are representative of what your job description shows.

**Before the Interview (Warm-up)**
“Thanks so much for meeting with us today. We really appreciate your time. Before starting, we would like to confirm a few things…”
- “I’d like to record our conversation for accuracy — is that okay with you?”

**Opening Questions – Breaking the Ice**
“To start, I’d love to hear about your journey.”
- “What brought you into nonprofit leadership?”
- “Can you share a bit about your path to becoming Executive Director here?”

**Mission & Vision**
“Let’s talk about the heart of the organization.”
- “What part of the mission resonates most personally with you?”
- “How do you see your organization making a unique difference in the community?”

**Leadership & Strategy**
“Leading a nonprofit brings a wide range of challenges and rewards…”
- “How would you describe your leadership style?”
- “What have been some of the biggest decisions you’ve had to make recently?”
- “How do you align your team and board around your strategic goals?”

**Programs & Impact**
“Let’s talk about the work on the ground.”
- “Which current programs are you most proud of?”
- “How do you assess impact and make improvements?”

**Fundraising & Financial Health**
“Sustainability is always on the radar…”
- “What’s your philosophy around fundraising and donor engagement?”
- “How do you approach financial stewardship and long-term planning?”

**Community Engagement**
“You’re part of a bigger ecosystem…”
- “How does your organization build trust and collaborate with community partners?”
- “How do you keep a pulse on the needs of the people you serve?”

**Challenges & Growth**
“Every organization faces roadblocks…”
- “What’s been one of the toughest challenges in your role, and how did you navigate it?”
- “How do you personally stay grounded and motivated in your work?”

**Looking Ahead**
“Let’s end by looking to the future.”
- “What are your hopes or goals for the organization in the next few years?”
- “If you had unlimited resources, what’s the one initiative you’d love to launch?”

**Wrap-Up**
“This has been such a great conversation — thank you!”
- “Is there anything we didn’t cover that you’d like to share?”
- “Would you be comfortable if I followed up later with any clarifying questions?”
- “Would you like to receive a copy of [the final article/report/summary]?”