

**Thinking About a New Role:
A Guide from PBR Executive Search**

THIS GUIDE

- At PBR Executive Search, we frequently get calls from professionals who are considering making a significant career change. While advising people on their next career move isn't *exactly* what we do, we get inquiries about this so often that we wanted to share some thoughts we hope will be valuable to you.
- This guide is filled with recommendations based on over two decades in the executive search business. At the end of the day, our recommendations for job seekers boil down to two pieces of advice: know what you're good at and what you're looking for. And: clearly articulate that with data and an appropriate mix of big-picture and detailed information. That's what makes the best candidates stand out above the rest.
- This guide includes a long list of ideas and recommendations. We do not think a successful job search requires you to utilize every single one. You are the expert in your career and yourself; use this guide in whatever way best supports you in this time of reflection and exploration.

WHO WE ARE

- PBR is an established retained executive search firm specializing in national searches in the nonprofit sector. We work with nonprofits in the arts & culture, education, environment, foundations, and human services sectors with budgets of \$5M to \$3B. Drawing on our personal network of talent, as well as strategic research in each field, we work with organizations to fill senior leadership positions.
- It's important to note that we don't market individual candidates to our clients (we are not agents). PBR works on behalf of our clients. You can see some of the positions we have filled on our [website](#).
- PBR team members have many years of combined experience in executive search, development, operations, education, HR, consulting, and recruiting. Over half of our team had careers in the nonprofit sector before joining the firm. You can read individual team member bios [here](#).
- Each week, our team spends many hours speaking to nonprofit leaders who represent the top of their respective fields—whether as clients, prospects, sources, or references. As a result, we have the inside scoop on the newest developments across a variety of subject areas and roles.
- Our active searches are listed on our [website](#). Feel free to check the site frequently, as we update it as we launch new searches.
- If you see a role listed that fits your skill set and experience, directions to apply are listed in the job description.

PREPARING FOR A JOB SEARCH

CREATING A JOB SEARCH FRAMEWORK

Before you begin your search for a new job, it's helpful to spend some time figuring out what you really want to do, and in what sector. Developing this Job Search Framework will allow you to be targeted in your networking, make specific requests of people who can help you along the way, and ensure that you aren't wasting time and energy pursuing opportunities that aren't what you are looking for.

When candidates come to us for job search advice, they often say, "I'm wide open, I'm happy to explore anything." And while that may be true, it's much harder to help someone go anywhere than to help them head in a specific direction.

The following questions are designed to help you define the ideal role for you. You can always decide to shift away from ideal toward "almost ideal" or even "close enough", but you'll do it knowingly and with full awareness of the tradeoffs you are making.

JOB SEARCH FRAMEWORK GUIDING QUESTIONS

Practical:

- What role and title are you looking for? Is it something specific?
- What level of compensation are you seeking?
- What benefits do you need? What can you live without? In the nonprofit sector, bigger organizations tend to have benefits that look more like those offered by corporations. Smaller organizations usually will have health insurance, but sometimes not much else. While we don't recommend asking about the benefits in your first conversation, knowing your nonnegotiables is helpful as you go through the process. Some benefits to consider: health and dental insurance, paid time off, and retirement plans.
- Do you want flexibility to work remotely? If so, how many days? WFH policies are currently shifting, and we anticipate that as time goes by, more organizations will insist that staff members come into work more frequently rather than less.
- How far are you willing to commute?
- Are you willing to move? Are you also *able* to move? (Think realistically: would your partner move? If you have children, could they switch schools?) Would you require financial compensation to consider a move?
- Are you open to frequent (or occasional) work travel? If so, how much?
- For all of these questions: What is *ideal*, what is *acceptable*, what is *unacceptable*?

Mission:

- What sector(s) do you want to work in? We encourage you to do enough research to understand the overall field you want to go into. For example, "I want to work on climate change," is not as useful as, "I want to work at an organization focused on climate change impact mitigation," or "deforestation" or "equity issues related to climate change impacts."

JOB SEARCH FRAMEWORK GUIDING QUESTIONS

Mission, Continued

- What are the values that drive you? Do you care most about the people you work with? An organization's impact? Flexibility and work life balance? Understanding what you value and how those values are manifested through your work will help you narrow down the opportunities you want to pursue.
- Do you want to help individual people (direct service) or fix root problems (systems change)?
- Do you want a role that is hands on and engaged with the people who benefit from the organization's work? Or are you happy working at an administrative/leadership level doing the work that supports program delivery?
- Do you want to work at an organization with a local, regional, national, or global reach?
- Do you thrive in very large organizations with clearly defined systems and structures? Or are you happier in an entrepreneurial environment that is still evolving?
- Do you like complexity (many programs serving a wide variety of populations) or do you prefer a more narrowly focused mission?
- Do you want to work at an organization with a demonstrated commitment to DEIAB work, and if so, in what ways?

Skills:

- How do you like spending your time at work? Usually, people like doing what they are best at. What are your five greatest strengths? Ideally, you want to find a job where you spend 80% of your time doing work that you are good at and enjoy.
- What do you know you *do not* want to be doing, or are not great at doing?
- How do you spend your time currently? Of that, what are you best at and what do you want to continue doing in your next job?
 - Do you love building things from scratch, or moving a well-resourced organization from good to great?
 - Are you excellent at change management? Do you thrive in "fixing" and turning around staff culture? Financial weaknesses? Operational policies and practices? Weak boards?
 - Do you like to set the vision and lead others to execute it? Or are you happiest implementing the vision that someone else has set?
 - Do you enjoy externally facing work (fundraising, lobbying, community engagement, board relations, partnerships, etc.) or do you prefer working internally and behind the scenes?
 - Do you want to manage a team or be a sole contributor?

RESUME DEVELOPMENT

Now that you have determined your ideal position (not just the title and the salary, but all the other elements of the work and the organization that you identified as important in the Job Search Framework) you are ready to develop a resume that will help you reach that ideal, or at least come close.

- State up front what you are looking for. “An executive director position with a nonprofit organization focused on arts education” is a clearer goal than “a leadership role in a nonprofit in New York City.” If arts education is too narrow, you could say “education” or “educational equity and access,” etc.
- Write your resume so that it is clear, concise, outcomes-oriented, and data-filled. It should be tailored for each role you apply for and highlight the key skills (think “superpowers”) and experiences that make you qualified for a role.
- Many people looking at your resume won’t know anything about the organizations where you’ve worked. Include mission, budget, staff counts – anything that will give the hiring manager a sense of the size, scope, and complexity of the organization.
- For each job listed, include a sentence or two about what you were hired to accomplish. We think of this as the mission of your job and is a quick way to convey the focus of your work to a potential employer.
- Each bullet should be outcomes-oriented, not task-focused. If you grew something (contributed income, earned income, number of locations), say by how much and over what period.
 - “I redesigned the website, which increased web traffic by 120% and online donations by 75% in a six-month period” is better than “I redesigned the website.”
 - “I rebuilt the team, hired 30 people in 30 days, and have had zero turnover in the past year” is better than “I rebuilt the team.”
 - Use strong, active verbs when describing your work.
- Formatting matters!
 - Make sure your resume is easy to scan; very few people read every word on a resume.
 - If it’s too dense, it will be overwhelming rather than informative.
 - Ensure you don’t have any typos and that formatting is consistent. Anything less than perfect indicates that you don’t pay attention to details.
 - A good design is a simple design. Images, bright colors, and too many hyperlinks are a distraction when a hiring manager is trying to parse the written content.
 - Be mindful to choose a font that is easy to read. Sans-serif fonts like Arial, Verdana, and Helvetica tend to work best.
- In some cases, you’ll want to apply to a job but find that you don’t fit every single requirement listed in the job description. If you think you would be a strong candidate because you possess the core skills, it’s crucial to acknowledge any gaps and how you would bridge them in your cover letter. It shows that you are thinking about yourself in relation to the role and have actually read and thought about the position description.

RESUME DEVELOPMENT

Continued

- Regarding references: when first applying for a role, it is not necessary to send references unless specifically requested. Once a potential employer decides they are interested, they will ask for references.
 - However, as you are preparing your resume, you should take time to think through who your references will be, so that you aren't scrambling to assemble a list when you do get asked for references.
 - A reference list should be well-balanced in relation to you: include supervisors, colleagues, and direct reports. Make sure to pick people who can really speak to your work and your strengths.
 - Before you add someone to your list and send it, make sure they are reachable and willing to be a reference. You should be contacting them before a hiring manager does.

ONLINE PRESENCE

It's important to have a professional LinkedIn presence that aligns with the information in your resume, and with reality. Presenting incorrect information online will immediately disqualify you from any search. Most organizations and search firms will do background checks on advancing candidates, which will reveal inconsistencies.

- LinkedIn
 - Many recruiters and search firms use LinkedIn to find candidates. Therefore, we encourage you to have a professional profile, which includes (at minimum) information about your past work experience and education, an About section, and an appropriate headshot.
 - Make sure that the organizations, titles, education, and dates on your LinkedIn profile match those on your resume. They should also be accurate (again, assume a thorough background check will be part of the process).
 - Include a work-appropriate headshot. It doesn't need to be taken by a professional photographer, but it shouldn't be a selfie either. A phone can be used to create a great LinkedIn headshot.
 - Include links to presentations, speeches, articles, etc., anything that will give recruiters and hiring teams a good sense of who you are and what you've accomplished.
 - Ensure that your About section accurately reflects your career.
 - Include as much detail as possible (both in your About section and your Experience section) so that you will appear in searches for skills, e.g. "frontline fundraising," in addition to job title searches.
 - You can include your personal email in your About section so that recruiters know how to reach you easily.
 - Adjust your settings so that you are marked as "Open to Opportunities." This will be visible to recruiters. You can even specify your openness to roles and geographic locations, so that recruiters will include you when searching for those criteria.
 - Follow the pages of recruiting firms active in your sector, professional associations, and relevant organizations.
- Other Social Media
 - Having other social media is not necessary. But if you are on social media, assume that any good search consultant or hiring team will scan your accounts. Ensure that what they find reflects positively on you.
- Personal Website
 - While not essential, we occasionally receive links to candidate's personal websites. Sometimes a personal website can convey your accomplishments in a way that a resume can't. If you have one, make sure it is up to date, correctly formatted, aligned with your resume, and includes contact information.
 - If you don't already have a personal website, we don't recommend spending your time making one. That is time better spent on other aspects of your job search.

RESEARCH AND NETWORKING

Once you have established a Job Search Framework and have prepared your materials, you can begin researching opportunities and networking.

BE TACTICAL

- Determine your timeline for making a career move and plan your activities accordingly.
- Identify how many hours per week you will spend on your search. This will allow you to prioritize between pressing tasks (e.g. sending in applications that are due soon) and less time-sensitive parts of your search (e.g. reaching out to a new contact).
 - Determine how you will track your contacts, your outreach, and your time. It can be as simple as keeping a running list on a legal pad or building out an Excel spreadsheet, or as complicated as contact management software.
 - Be systematic; set a goal for how you spend your time. In the beginning, you'll likely focus on making a list of people to network with. In subsequent weeks, you might set a goal for the number of people you plan to reach out to or the number of applications you will submit.
- Searching for a new job takes time. Having a time bound plan that includes specific action steps and weekly goals will help ensure that you use your time wisely and increase the odds of reaching your goal.

IDENTIFYING YOUR NETWORK AND REACHING OUT

- Identify your network: It is always best to start with people you have a connection with. Take some time to create an expansive list and then prioritize it.
 - Focus on individuals closest to you and ask them for specific introductions to people that they are connected to. Think of moving out in concentric circles, with your biggest fans and supporters at the center and people you don't know but would like to in the outer ring.
 - Focusing on the people most likely to want to help you serves two purposes: first, it's easiest to ask for help from people that you know and having positive experiences in your early networking will give you confidence as you reach out to more distant contacts. Second, as you network, you'll begin to create a daisy chain that could lead to warm introductions to those currently unknown people in the outer ring.
 - Use LinkedIn, the alumni database at your college or university, and professional associations and organizations to help you find connections between the people you know and the people you want to know.
- Reach out to your network. Because people are busy (but also tend to want to help) be specific about what you are asking for. This allows people to come prepared with ideas and comments when you meet and makes people feel like you are using their time well. Reasons could include but are not limited to asking a contact to:
 - Serve as a thought partner on your Job Search Framework: "Can I talk this through with you?" or, "Would you give me feedback on how I'm thinking about my skillset?"

IDENTIFYING YOUR NETWORK AND REACHING OUT

Continued

- Make an introduction to one or more people in their network.
- Share the story of how they made the transition from X field to Y field (or whatever else might give you information about how to make your own journey from where you are to where you want to go).
- Give you feedback on your resume.
- Conduct a mock interview with you.
- Scheduling calls:
 - Share your availability to minimize going back and forth over email.
 - Good: “Please feel free to let me know what works well in your schedule in the coming weeks; I have also noted a few times that work well for me. Once I hear back from you, I will follow up with a calendar invitation including Zoom details. If you prefer to speak by phone, please let me know the best number for reaching you.”
 - Not helpful: “I can be available anytime.” This puts all the work of finding a convenient time on the person you want help from. Limiting the choices makes scheduling easier, not harder.
 - If you aren’t available at a time your contact offers, just say, “I’m sorry, I’m not free then.” You don’t owe anyone an explanation of why you aren’t free, and no one needs to hear about your doctor’s appointment or other commitments.
- Dress professionally. Come to informational meetings (in Zoom or in person) as though you are showing up for an interview. You want the people you are speaking with to be impressed by your professionalism and judgment. We’ve conducted informational interviews with people who showed up in sweatshirts, rumpled shirts, or tank tops. This is less about how someone looks and more about the poor judgment it demonstrates.
- Be on time. We shouldn’t have to say it, but alas, we do. And if you are going to be late, text to let the person know.
- Create a professional environment. If you are on Zoom, make sure your background is tidy or blurred, the lighting looks professional, and you have a reliable internet connection that will allow for clear audio and video. Your pets should be secured in another room, and your cell phone should be off.
- At the beginning of the call, remind the person why you are speaking and what you hope to get out of the call. Keep an eye on the clock and don’t go over the allotted meeting time. At the end of the call, say thank you and follow up immediately with an appreciative note. To further build the relationship, keep in touch as you go through your job search. Once you land in your new position, let everyone you spoke to along the way know where you ended up and thank them again for their time.

RESEARCHING ADDITIONAL CONTACTS

At some point in your search, you may need to expand your research outside of your immediate network. Consider using some or all of the tools below to help you identify the right types of organizations and roles for you and find the people who can help you access them.

- Google! Don't underestimate the power of a simple Google search to unearth new leads to people, organizations, and information that might be helpful in your job hunt.
- Conference websites for relevant fields are filled with information (and people!) who can help connect you to others with similar backgrounds and interests.
- University departments (and leaders who run them) can also be good people to network with.
- Using job posting sites is an interesting way to get a sense of industry compensation levels, the number of open positions in a particular functional area or sector, leadership changes, etc.
- Visit your alma mater's career page and take advantage of services and networking opportunities.
- Look at the websites for affinity groups, based on geography, identity, sector, skills, etc.
- As you are identifying people you'd like to network with, or organizations where you'd like to work, toggle back to LinkedIn. Who in your existing network is one or two degrees of separation away from someone you'd like to meet? It's easiest for someone to help you network if you reach out and say, "I see you know x, y, or z person. I'm looking for a job similar to theirs. Would you be willing to introduce me?" And then, before you have a networking meeting, see who that person is connected to and ask for a specific introduction. It's much harder to say no to a specific request than a vague, general one.

RESEARCHING ORGANIZATIONS

- [GuideStar](#) is a website that has publicly searchable listings of all nonprofits in the United States and can be used to find information about organizations where you might want to work.
- With a free account, you can create filtered searches to find organizations by sector, see their revenue and expense data, and access recent 990 tax forms (which list income, expenses, and salaries of the highest paid people in the organization).
- Use GuideStar to find the most relevant organizations to you, and then browse their websites to see if the information there resonates with you.
- Using the organization's website and LinkedIn, you can also find people who have jobs similar to the one you are seeking and, perhaps more importantly, understanding their career path.

INTERVIEWING

Interviewing is a crucial step in the search process and can take the form of “exploratory” interviews that are closer to networking calls or formal interviews as you advance through a search.

- Before the interview, identify the four things you are great at and examples that demonstrate your abilities in each area. These are your superpowers.
- The job description contains the answers you need. Read it carefully before the interview and be prepared to share specific examples of accomplishments that align with the required skills and experiences detailed in the spec. In addition, be prepared to discuss:
 - Why you are interested in the role. Be sure your answer is more about the organization than your own career growth (though you can talk about that too).
 - What makes you uniquely qualified for the position. Speak about your superpowers and how they pertain to the requirements of the job.
 - Any gaps in your resume.
 - Frequent job transitions. If you’ve changed jobs frequently, be prepared to discuss each move in detail. Job hopping is a red flag that any good interviewer will dig into.
 - If you’ve been fired or had a negative experience with your previous employer, process the emotions about it BEFORE you interview for your next role. No matter how wronged you feel, or justified in criticizing your previous employer, DO NOT say anything negative. Rather, frame the conversation in terms of your own mistakes and what you learned from them and what you would do differently in the future.
- Find ways to “Trojan horse” key information into your interview answers. You should go into the interview ready to convey your most impressive and relevant experiences and skills while also answering the questions you’ve been asked.
- When scheduling an interview, pay attention to how you communicate. Hiring managers and recruiters use your email interactions to judge your written skills, ability to schedule meetings, and your overall professional demeanor.
- Bring high energy to the meeting, particularly if you are looking for an externally facing, leadership position. Yes, it’s an interview, but the hiring manager or search committee will assume that how you show up at the interview is likely to be how you will show up at work.
- Communicate strategically. The interviewer has your resume. Rather than walk through your whole career, talk about what you’ve learned in aggregate.
- For any skill or experience, provide one example, and then offer to provide another if helpful. Providing too many examples overloads your interviewer with information.
- Before you answer a question, provide a headline. For example, if you are asked to talk about a fundraising success, you might begin with: “This is the story about cultivating a seven-figure campaign gift from a previous donor who had become disgruntled with the organization. It demonstrates my tenacity, my ability to build rapport with challenging people, and my knowledge of how to move someone from ‘no way’ to ‘yes’ in a short period of time.”
- Always send a follow-up thank you note that is more than one sentence long and refers back to, and perhaps amplifies, something that was discussed in the interview.

TRANSITIONING FROM FOR-PROFIT TO NONPROFIT

- While discrete skills can transfer from the for-profit to nonprofit sector, there are also many differences, and you want to be mindful of what you don't know. Before you start talking to potential employers, do your homework:
 - Talk to friends who work at nonprofits and ask questions about their experiences.
 - Join a nonprofit board or be a hands-on volunteer. Demonstrated commitment to the sector will give you much more credibility as an applicant.
 - Fundraising experience is important for almost every nonprofit leadership position. Gain experience by raising money for your alma mater or children's school. Take a fundraising class at a local college or university. Read books about fundraising. If you have sales experience, make the connection between closing a sale and closing a donation to a nonprofit. Be specific about how you will continue to grow in this area.
- Be humble. Too often, people from the private sector view nonprofit jobs as easier or less demanding than corporate roles. Or they assume that their business experience makes them more qualified than people who have spent their careers moving up the nonprofit ladder. Be aware that in some regard, you don't yet know what you don't know. Approach each conversation as a learner eager to find out more, not as an expert who is going to come in and show the nonprofit people "how it's done".

IN SUMMARY

- As you begin your job search, the most important thing to start out with is a list of priorities, generated by the Job Search Framework. These consist of your “must-haves,” your “nice-to-haves,” and your other preferences.
- The framework will lead you on your job search, as you move from preparatory research, resume and online profile development, reaching out to your network, forging new contacts, applying to roles and interviewing.
- Throughout your job search process, be authentic, honest, and true to yourself. Don’t tell a contact or interviewer something, just because you believe that is what you are “supposed to say.” This will lead you toward a role that is truly the right fit for you as a person.
- Stick with it! Finding a new role is difficult, and it’s easy to be discouraged. Stay positive and don’t give up!

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