

## SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING APPLICATION MATERIALS

(Please do not copy or amend without permission.)

*Listed below are a number of suggestions for consideration as you develop your application materials. Most institutions request a well-written cover letter tailored to the position, a full CV and a list of professional references (generally 5 references) in order to be considered for the position. We have developed these guidelines in response to the typical errors made by candidates and the expectations that Search Committees have of candidates.*

### OVERALL GUIDELINES FOR FORMATTING AND LAYOUT OF YOUR APPLICATION MATERIALS

- Provide your full contact details in a visible location on both the cover letter and CV. Include full home and work addresses, all telephone contact numbers (cell, work, home), and email addresses (personal and work).
- *Do not use the letterhead of your current institution.* Search committee members can dismiss your candidacy if they feel that you are using office time and institutional materials inappropriately.
- Similarly, you should indicate the use of private email and cell phone as preferred points of contact; they also help confidentiality, as assistants and others may access work accounts. If you list a private email address, please check that address regularly for updates on the search.
- Label the pages of your cover letter, CV and reference list; ensure that you include page numbers and consider putting your name in a footer or header.
- Avoid using acronyms throughout the documents wherever possible. For long titles or organization names you reference frequently, you might spell out the name in full the first time, putting the acronym in parentheses immediately following; you may then use the acronym in subsequent references. Remember, the search committee will review many applications so don't make it difficult for them to review your materials.
- Proofread and spellcheck your documents! Poor grammar and punctuation, spelling errors, and, yes, referring to the institution or the position title incorrectly could derail your candidacy. If at all possible, ask a colleague or friend whom you trust to proofread your application materials; absent that, reading the documents aloud will help you hone in on errors.
- Use paragraph breaks appropriately and use bullets only if you think it important to help highlight key points. Don't overuse bullets and don't reiterate the same bulleted information in your CV.
- Some search committee members will read your cover letter first and then move to your CV while others will do the opposite. If a committee member opts to read your cover letter first, we recommend that you include a few sentences right after your introductory paragraph so that you provide the reader with a quick overview of your current position as well as other key positions you have held in the past few years.

## **FRAMING YOUR COVER LETTER**

- Each institution and each position is unique, so you will want to use your letter to help the search committee see the particular way in which your candidacy meets their needs. That means that you will need to develop original materials for each application, featuring the particular aspects of your background and experience that are most relevant to the position sought.
- Re-read the ad and profile description carefully before beginning to compose the cover letter. The portions of the search prospectus subtitled “First Year Agenda” or “Key Priorities” and “Desired Characteristics” provide you with lists of the important skills, experiences, and qualifications expected for this position. Be sure to address these. *Please note:* In our roles as search consultants, we provide the search committee with a checklist that is extracted from the search profile, and committee members will review your application using the checklist as a guide.
- Consider using the listed requirements, expectations or “leadership agenda” as the structuring principle for your letter, even developing a first draft using them as an outline. You do not have to use these specifically as headings, though we have seen that approach be well received by some committee members. Especially in the case of a very long list, you might cluster some that are related.
- Speak to your abilities in each of the areas and provide specific examples to illustrate your claim. This will ensure that you highlight the relevance of your experience to what they are looking for, and it will help you to process the fit between your experience and the institution/position. Though you should focus on your experiences in your most recent positions, this approach allows you also to draw in relevant experience from multiple work experiences, illustrating depth of experience. It also ensures that your cover letter does not read either like a form letter or like a narrative summary of your CV.
- Provide specificity of examples; make the connection for the Search Committee. Help them do their job in looking for experience that speaks to their needs. Not only are you demonstrating what you have done but how you have done it.
- Your cover letter also provides an opportunity to address softer skills such as your leadership philosophy, your approach to diversity and inclusion, and so forth.
- Here are a few things to avoid in your cover letter – do not boldface or highlight words or phrases; and ideally, stay away from bullets in your cover letter. You can reserve bullets for your CV.

### **Addressing your Cover Letter**

- Address your letter to the search chair if that information is made available in the ad or the search prospectus. Alternatively, address your letter generally to the search committee: Dear Members of the Search Committee.
- It is acceptable to address your letter to the search consultant/s if the search chair’s name is unavailable.

### Your Opening Paragraph

- Start your letter with a broad statement of your interest and the match between your skills/experience and what they seek in their next leader. Discuss why you are interested and what draws you to this particular position at this time and at this point in your career.
- Essentially, you should open up your letter with a strong statement about what draws you to the institution and the position. Focus on the distinctiveness of the institution, mission, things in the profile that demonstrate to the search committee why you are drawn to this opportunity.

### Length of Cover Letter

- Keep your cover letter to a maximum of four pages single-spaced.
- The ideal font type and size are Times New Roman size 12 (used here).
- We recommend that you use standard margins for your letter.
- Don't overcrowd the document or make it difficult to read by using fancy fonts, small fonts or color. Usage of large fonts may suggest you don't have much substance to your letter.

### Addressing Break/s in your Work History

- If there is a break in your work history (i.e. you were asked to step down, demoted, worked in industry or went back to school, family responsibilities, etc.) use the opportunity that the letter affords you to frame the situation for this audience.
- It is generally better to address the “situation” or “circumstance” directly rather than to allow Search Committee members to come to their own conclusions otherwise.
- Not a lot of detail is required, and you can offer to elaborate further if provided with an opportunity to interview with the committee. In doing so, avoid criticizing the people involved.  
(And, especially if the situation is still sensitive or uncomfortable for you, practice talking about it – and answering questions – with someone you trust.)

## **PREPARING AN ADMINISTRATIVE CV**

As you prepare your application materials, it is important for you to think through why you are asked to submit a CV and how that CV can strengthen your candidacy for the position to which you are applying. As the story of your professional life, a CV prepared for an administrative or leadership role provides a mechanism for documenting your credentials and expertise in areas relevant to the position of interest. In addition to listing the traditional areas of employment as well as teaching, scholarship, service and grants activity, it clearly needs to show the scope of your responsibilities including your level of managerial experience, the budgets that you have managed, and the accomplishments and outcomes in your areas of responsibility.

With that in mind and remembering that the search committee is your frontline audience, you will realize that an existing version of your CV may not be adequate for this audience. In addition, you will want to consider whether even a single version of an administrative CV is optimal for every position you decide to pursue. In addition to your professional history, you want to be sure that your CV provides an understanding of the skills, qualifications and

experiences that are of particular interest for that position. What you decide to include and highlight in the CV can be tailored to each position to which you are applying. The priorities in a given position description (often featured as a leadership agenda, scope of responsibilities, leadership priorities, expectations and opportunities, or first year agenda) may influence how you sequence and otherwise feature in your CV the experience that provides evidence of your readiness in each of the critical areas. And, as an aside, be mindful that gaps – or appearances of gaps – in your CV often raise questions.

You might consider creating a *source* CV, i.e., one that lists all of your experiences and accomplishments, to keep a log of all of your accomplishments. You can then draw from this list as you tailor your CV for the specific job application.

### Listing your Degrees

- The first page of your CV should ideally list your academic qualifications.
- Is a particular degree required or preferred? Do they ask for an earned terminal degree, or more specifically for an earned doctorate? Or the PhD? Is there flexibility for an EdD or other doctorate? Would they accept a terminal degree such as an MFA, for example? Institutions generally are (or need to be) vigilant about the degree requirements in searches, so be attentive to whether you hold the degree that is required for the position.
- Do not include your dissertation topic (except, *perhaps*, if it is uniquely suited to the specific expectations for a position), the name of your advisor, your GPA, even if you achieved a 4.0!
- Including dates for your degrees may be a choice, but the absence of degree dates often raises questions from members of the search committee, so decide whether you want to take that risk.

### Regarding Personal Information

- Try not to include information about your personal life; the CV is a professional history, so avoid listing your age, your marital status or spouse's name, the number of your dependents or their names, etc.
- Please do not include photos. They are not standard practice in the U.S. and so often raise questions.
- List hobbies only if particularly relevant or provide valuable texture to your candidacy; otherwise please avoid.

### Listing your Key Positions

- This is the core of the document, so try to structure your CV to provide a clear sense of the trajectory and scope of your professional experience. Reverse chronological order is standard practice.
- Organizing your professional experience by institution (and full scope of your employment there) is usually most effective. For each institution or organization where you have worked, it can be helpful to include a brief description. So, for example, if you have worked at “Everland College” you could provide the following information:  
*Everland College is a largely residential, selective liberal arts college located in*

*Rochester, New York with an enrollment of 2500 students and 150 full time faculty. The institution offers two professional programs in healthcare and is about to launch an online doctoral program in education.*

- Organization by institution (rather than by position title, followed by the institution's name) is especially helpful if you have held multiple positions at a given institution. In this case, you can illustrate both the longevity of your institutional tenure, followed by each specific position (including relevant dates, the scope of responsibilities, and the accomplishment particular to that role). Providing this form of organization offers the reader a more consolidated story and shows that your institution has valued you and deployed you in different ways.
- For each leadership position you have held, include a brief description of the scope of your responsibilities, followed by a bulleted list of particular outcomes or accomplishments that illustrate your effectiveness. You may choose to sequence the list of accomplishments to feature up front the priorities of the position you are seeking.

#### Professional Development

- If you have participated in professional programs, you can opt to list these early in your CV if the list is short; if not, provide this information later in the document.
- With the exception of required professional certifications, do not include professional development with your earned degrees.

#### Your List of Publications

- If the list of publications is lengthy, consider whether the nature of the position and the institution require the full list.
- If your publications include both disciplinary and administrative scholarship, consider having a separate heading for each category to help feature your active engagement in areas related to the leadership position you seek.
- If you choose not to include a full list, be cautious with a “selected list”, being sure to include a note indicating how the selection was made, e.g., 10 of 50 peer reviewed articles. Also note if those listed are the most recent, or those most relevant to the position, or some other criteria.
- Also based on the nature of the position, consider where in the CV to include the list. If publications are not a required expectation for the position, they may best go at/towards the end of the document.

#### The Length of your CV

- The length of the document depends on the scope and relevance of the information you include. Be mindful that search committees are looking for the information that is most relevant to them, and they don't want to have to dig through 50 pages (or more!) to find it. Do not list every class you have taught, every meeting you have attended, every doctoral student you have mentored, every grant you have written (especially when you did not secure funding!), every presentation you have made, and every document you have published. (Frankly this level of detail oftentimes harms your candidacy and is

better recorded in the source CV recommended above.) Instead, select and sequence the information that is most relevant to the given position.

*If you are an Internal Candidate*

- If you are an internal candidate, your CV should be the same as for an external position, designed to feature the strength and relevance of your experience to the position sought.
- Be mindful that those around the search committee table may think they know you but may not have seen the entirety of your relevant experience. Be sure to include your key responsibilities and accomplishments but be mindful in your descriptions that you are addressing an audience of people who likely have had at least indirect contact with or knowledge of the initiatives you include.

**YOUR REFERENCE LIST**

- Many applications require a reference list (3 – 5 references). Steer clear of providing character references. If you're applying for a mid- or senior level position, you must provide strong professional references, ideally from people who can speak directly to your preparedness in areas of importance to the position. Select at least one reference from your current institution, if at all possible.
- Ideally you want to select a mix of individuals from these three categories: peer, direct supervisor, and direct supervisee. Consider a gender and racial mix as well.
- If possible, avoid including “professional colleagues,” i.e., individuals based at other institutions whom you know from a professional association or organization, or with whom you have collaborated on a project. These individuals are only able to speak about your abilities on a very limited scale and can't address your day to day management style, your budgetary skills, your ability to implement a new project or program, or your style/effectiveness in the workplace.
- For each of your references provide the following information:
  - Full name and title
  - Current or former institutional affiliation
  - Preferred e-mail address
  - Telephone numbers (office, cell, home, with preferred contact indicated)
  - One or two sentences describing your relationship with this individual

We hope you find these guidelines helpful. We are aware that other consultants and consulting firms differ in their approach to application materials. So, feel free to extract what would be helpful for you.

Good luck!

Your Academic Search Team