Library Director's Search Committee
Minutes
10 August 2015

The 10 August meeting of the Search Committee was called to order at 6:03 pm. The meeting was held in the main library third floor conference room. Committee members Yung-Hsing Wu (chair), Suzanne Dardeau, Andrew Duhon, and Jeannie Kramer were present. Four members of the community, including Adele Blue, Jamal Taylor, and Joseph Gordon-Wiltz (current and incoming Library Board members), were also in attendance.

The meeting began with a brief review of material prepared by Dr. Dardeau, who has recently attended workshops at the meeting of the American Library Association focused on the use of consulting firms. From these workshops she learned that using a consulting firm takes typically 3-4 months, if not longer.

Mrs. Kramer began the broad discussion of the search by asking if an advertisement can be placed without there being an actual opening, and if so, does the city/parish council need to confirm, or does it rest with the board? Mr. Duhon and Dr. Dardeau replied that an advertisement can be placed ahead of an actual opening, and that it is the board's purview.

Dr. Dardeau emphasized that given the board's role in making policy recommendations, that it ought to establish qualities and duties of the director, and that these need to be made relevant to the director's performance evaluation.

Mrs. Kramer argued that during the previous search the board did not incur a greater burden not using a search firm. Based on that previous experience she emphasized a number of issues: the significance of writing a clear and specific job description; her preference that the board hire a librarian, not a management person. Her concern about consulting firms lie with the pool of candidates (to what extent do these firms draw on individuals who have paid a fee to be on their database/lists?); the board's retaining control of search (particularly when checking candidate references); the efficacy of having firm travel to interview at candidates' locations. She recommended that the board embark on a national search that includes a two-step interview process of top 5 candidates (phone first, then in person). She also urged the board to consider appointing to the hiring committee one local elected official. In response to a question from Dr. Dardeau, she noted that the previous hiring process took approximately 6 months.

Dr. Wu asked if other individuals present had prior experience working with a consulting firm. Mr. Taylor reported a negative experience during the hiring process for the president of Southern University. He stated that using search firms is in his mind a waste of money. He also observed that timing will be tricky, as the board does not know Ms. Dombourian will retire. Dr. Dardeau noted that it will be important for the new director to have some time in overlap with Ms. Dombourian.

Mr. Duhon remarked that he supports using a consulting firm so long as the board articulates specifically its expectations and autonomy (of checking references, for instance). He noted that that some benefits accompany using a search firm. He suggested that the board check those who have been hired the search firm Bradbury Gossage.

Ms. Theunissen agreed that using a search firm could enhance search capacity so long as the board retains control. She noted that Bradbury Gossage is a national firm, with respective boards paying fees (applicants do not). A firm ike Bradbury Goassage can access data more quickly, while the board should, in her opinion, check references. She expressed concern that Bradbury Gossage might present this search with candidates it has in its "pool."

Mr. Duhon asked how likely is it that there will be a candidate coming up the ranks from within the system, or even from within the state. Mrs. Kramer thought the latter is possible (via other systems in the state), and remarked further that the board ought to retain the right to recruit candidates. The state library system might be a resource on this count. Dr. Dardeau wondered if some of the concern about the board's autonomy might be addressed by a very structured contract with the search firm.

A member of the public stated that the board's first order of business should to get a job description written and review it with search firm(s). Mrs. Kramer advised that the board should spell out what it wants from a director.

Ms. Theunissen stated that since the committee can't yet make a definitive decision about using a search firm, it should research the firm and learn in particular about its process to present to the board. A discussion ensued regarding what questions the committee would like Bradbury Goassage to answer:

What is a typical timeline and stages? Where do you advertise – what's the range of advertisability?

How much latitude does the board have in contract design? in writing job description? In contacting candidates on our own initiatve? Can we see all applications? (including those the firm does not recommend?) Can we come up with number for the short list? Is there a prohibition against hiring someone the firm does not recommend? Do we have veto rights?

What is the fee structure? What is the finder's fee? Is the candidate paying a member's fee? Stay on fee?

In your speciality, who do you think are your top three peers?

After Mr. Duhon raised the issue of applicants meeting the qualifications, Dr. Dardeau observed that the job descriptions for Baton Rouge and Shreveport are all on-line. Mr. Taylor noted that updating the job description is important. Mr. Duhon suggested that the search committee talk to those library boards about their experiences working with the consulting firm. Mrs. Blue asked if either Baton Rouge or Shreveport had successfully hired a new director. The search committee will conduct specific research on the Baton Rouge and Shreveport searches. Mrs. Kramer suggested that the committee also contact the State Library and the LSU dean of library.

After a brief discussion of the proper degree of public access to these meetings, and drawing up a rough schedule of search committee meetings, Dr. Wu adjourned the meeting at 7:35pm.