

19 tips for making your job posting so amazing, unicorns will weep tears of joy

Like 808



[Image description: A black-and-white image of a unicorn looking at a butterfly. It looks like a cutout from black paper. The unicorn has flowing manes, is standing on the ground with grass and flowers and a tree, and is looking to our left. There is a crescent moon on the upper right corner of the image. Image obtained from Pixabay.com]

We need to talk about a serious problem that's been ignored for a long time. No, not the lack of gel pens given out by vendors during conferences (Seriously, vendors, get better pens! Ballpoint is so cliché!) I'm talking about job postings—they suck. They have sucked for a long time. I bet when aliens dig up remnants of the human race, they'll encounter our job postings and go, "....." which is alien telepathic language for "these documents suck; no wonder their civilization collapsed."

We've been using the same format, the same tired language, and the same archaic requirements. We need to do better. Unemployment is down, meaning there is more competition for talent. Plus, while we talk about bringing diversity and inclusion, so many of our job posting practices—probably passed down from the 1900s, when...Eli Whitney invented the, uh, printing press with...moveable plates (I didn't do so well in History)—are thoughtless, helping to exclude many diverse candidates.

So, let's do better. I asked the [NAF Facebook community](#) for feedback on things that irritate them about job postings and what they'd wish to see. I got over 200 comments, which I distilled down to a few key ones below, listed in no particular order. This is by no means comprehensive. If all of us could commit to doing many of these things, it will do a lot for our organizations, and for our sector as a whole:

1. **Sound like a human being.** A job posting is an ad, meaning something designed to entice people to check out your organization. But for some reason, we seem to think of them as some sort of legal document, making them sound very boring and stuffy, full of academic terminology and a formal tone. If they are ads, the majority of job postings are the equivalent of commercials for cholesterol-lowering drugs. Ditch the big words and talk like a human being. Show a sense of humor and personality. You are trying to attract candidates. Attract them, not put them to sleep.
2. **List your salary range:** I wrote an entire [post](#) about this, so I don't want to rehash this. Besides wasting everyone's time, not listing salary range **screws over people of color and women**. There is no good reason

for salary cloaking. None. For Equity's sake, just list the range and end the charade. And make sure it's reasonable, not something like "\$28,000 to \$94,000, DOE." (If you're going to argue with this point, please make sure the read the post above first).

3. **Be realistic with job duties.** Yes, especially in the nonprofit sector, employees have to be able to do multiple jobs. But it's gotten ridiculous, with the cramming of three or four jobs' worth of essential duties into one. Also, ridiculously grandiose requirements. Says one colleague "I saw one that required a 'proven history of creating lasting social change' or something like that. Who is this candidate??? I mean, Nelson Mandela is dead, so..." Figure out what the key responsibilities are, and focus on those. Stop listing everything you can think of because you're trying to cover your bases. That's just lazy. And even if you aren't lazy, you are looking for a team member, not McGyver or The Pope.
4. **Do not force people to send a resume and ALSO fill out an application:** It's the same information! Those online application forms are time-consuming and torturous, so to ask candidates to fill one out when all that information has been carefully formatted into their resume is redundant and excessive. If you do require an application (instead of a resume), make sure it's user-friendly, such as asking for recent positions (not all of them since high school) and as presenting a list of any essay questions in advance so candidates can prepare their thoughts in advance.
5. **Do not ask for references with initial applications:** Who does this? Apparently enough people for this to be extremely irritating. People don't want to bother their references until they are in the final stages of a hiring process. Plus, some candidates may not have informed their current employer that they are looking for a job, and it puts them into a bind when you ask for references with the initial application.
6. **Accept equivalent experience for degrees:** I've written about the sad irony of so many nonprofits requiring formal degrees for even entry-level jobs when so many of us in the nonprofit sector are trying to fight education inequity. I'm not against formal education, but it is only one way—and a poor one—to determine if a candidate has the skills you need. You are leaving behind many candidates who may have incredible experience and skills but who may not have the degrees. Yes, some specialized positions do need a degree or certificate (doctors, accountants, mental health counselors, etc.). But the vast majority—even positions like CEOs and EDs—do not. We know the education system is inequitable and leaving behind many people; don't screw them a second time with a degree requirement if the position is not specialized.
7. **Talk about your org's values, culture, and what makes it awesome:** Again, this is an advertisement for people to want to come work for you. Organizational culture is a huge reason why people stay or leave their jobs, and yet we barely talk about this at all on job postings. Discuss your values, why the team is amazing, what sort of culture you have. If you're dog-friendly or kid-friendly, mention it. If you're in an amazing neighborhood with 30 diverse restaurants and two artisanal ice cream stores or whatever, throw that in too.
8. **Describe your hiring process and timeline:** Tell candidates when you plan to interview, for what length of time, how many rounds total, whether and when writing samples or other supplemental materials are required, when you hope to make a decision, and when you hope candidates will start. There's too much of a tendency to make stuff up as we go along, even asking candidates "If you get hired, when can you start" when we don't even know when we might make the hiring decision. This is disrespectful to job candidates and only builds the narrative that your organization is disorganized and treats people like crap. I've heard horror stories of people going through five rounds of interviews or waiting in limbo for six months without any warning. If you are not clear about your process and timeline, you are not ready to hire.

9. **Describe the work schedule and flexibility:** “Occasional nights and weekends” is meaningless. How occasional? Is it every weekend? One weekend a month? Two evening meetings a week? 70 hours a week during gala season followed by the office being closed for three days? Are you closed between Christmas and New Year? Can people work from home regularly? These things are important and make a huge difference, especially in the nonprofit sector, where the pay may not be as competitive as we wish.
10. **Break down responsibilities by percentage:** Says one colleague: I always appreciate the breakdown of work (70% on donor stewardship, 25% on donor database management, 5% other duties) knowing what the priority or majority of work will be.” This is not just helpful for the candidates, but it is a good exercise for employers to do to prevent misalignment of expectations and priorities. It’s especially very helpful for combined positions such as the common Development/Communications combo.
11. **Ensure requirements match the level and pay of the position.** “If a position requires a master’s degree and 10+ years of in-depth experience doing a variety of different tasks, maybe offer to pay more than \$30,000 a year? Alternately, if you can only afford to pay someone \$30,000 a year, maybe re-examine your wish list and prune it down to more realistic levels?” There are so many job postings floating around that seem to miss this point completely. Your organization will seem completely clueless and out-of-touch.
12. **Stop requiring a car, driver’s license, car insurance, etc.** Unless you are hiring a driver to deliver hot meals or something, think about whether a candidate really needs to have a car. Because you may be excluding candidates with disabilities who rely on public transportation. Plus, cars are expensive, which also excludes low-income candidates. As a colleague says, “If y’all would just hire me already, maybe I could actually afford a car in the future.” And cars are terrible for the environment. We should be discouraging their usage, not thoughtlessly requiring it as a default.
13. **Knock it off with “must be able to lift 50 pounds.”** Again, this is another requirement that discriminates against candidates with disabilities or others who may not be able to lift heavy things. But when has any of us had to lift a 50-pound anything that we couldn’t ask another team member for help? I’ve been using my veganism to get out of such tasks for 12 years, so it’s not exactly essential. Some jobs do need the skill of lifting heavy stuff—certain positions at food banks, for example—but most do not, so be thoughtful, or you end up leaving out awesome candidates.
14. **List reporting relationships:** To whom does this person report, and whom do they supervise? Spell out the titles and, if possible, the names. Remember the adage about management: people don’t quit jobs, they quit supervisors. So it’s weird that they may have no idea when they apply who they might be reporting to.
15. **Spell out benefits:** This is another segment in the listing that employers fail to take advantage of. “Generous benefits package.” Boring, and a waste of opportunity to attract candidates. List your vacation/sick/PTO policies, holidays, whether you have 403b plans or other retirement stuff, what percentage employees are responsible for paying of medical benefits, etc. If you have awesome benefits, tout them. (RVC has amazing health benefits, as well as awesome snacks, which we indicate in our [job postings](#)).
16. **No more “other duties as assigned”:** This has become a joke. Other duties as assigned is just a way of saying, “Other stuff we can’t think of right now, but we want our butts covered in case we need you to do it.” It’s lazy. Especially in this sector, we all know we’ll be doing stuff that’s outside the scope of a job posting, so there’s no need to put this disclaimer. What we should all be doing is spending more time thinking through the job, its priorities and desired outcomes, and the primary duties entailed to reach those outcomes, and then being very clear in our job postings so that candidates are not surprised.

17. **Don't surprise people:** Says a colleague, *"Five minutes into the interview they asked if I was okay with the position being part-time. Huh? This was not anywhere in the job description, nor did the HR person who scheduled the interview disclose that it was a part-time position [...] And mind you, this was for a Chief Development Officer position. This is major detail that should have been disclosed!"* Sheesh. If you have information that might discourage candidates from applying, put it out there. Don't think you can get people in through deception, and then hope they'll fall in love with you despite whatever sensitive information you left out.
18. **List a contact, in case people have questions:** Good candidates will be thorough with their research and ask really great questions. Assign one person they can talk to if they have questions. Usually this may be the person in charge of the hiring process; sometimes it is not. Don't keep candidates guessing.
19. **Have a thoughtful statement of equal opportunity and non-discrimination:** Here's an [example](#). This statement, often put at the end of job postings, serves more than just a legal role. Many candidates check to see if it is there. It provides a degree of reassurance to diverse candidates that diversity, equity, and inclusion matter to your organization. Yeah, a statement itself is not enough, and many employers just copy and paste without thinking much about what it means to live up to it. If you haven't examined your equal opportunity statement in a while, spend some time reviewing it with your team and board and update it and check to see if you are living up to it.

There are a whole bunch of other tips, I'm sure. Please list them in the comment section. We all need to do better. Because of the power dynamics, we have been taking job candidates for granted, thinking we're doing them a favor by giving them an opportunity to compete to work with us. Many of us have been acting like jerks to our colleagues in the form of the hiring process, and we may not even realize it. Job postings are often the first connection people make with our organizations. Do we want this impression to be one of mutual respect, shared goals, and collaboration; or one of arrogance, boringness, and thoughtlessness? I hope the first set.

Here's an example of a job posting for a [Development Director](#), from my organization. We still have some improvements to make, but I'm proud of my team for putting time and attention into it. By the way, we received many great candidates, but that position—like all our positions—are open until filled, so it's not too late to apply. And we are in a neighborhood surrounded by 30 diverse restaurants and shops, including two artisanal ice cream stores!

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Support the maintenance of this website by buying NWF (Now NAF) t-shirts and mugs and other stuff.

Make Mondays suck a little less. Get a notice each Monday morning when a new post arrives. Subscribe to NAF by scrolling to the top right of this page (maybe scroll down a little) and enter in your email address (if you're on the phone, it may be at the bottom). Also, join the NAF Facebook community for daily hilarity.

Also, join **Nonprofit Happy Hour**, a peer support group on Facebook, and if you are an ED/CEO, join **ED Happy Hour**. These are great forums for when you have a problem and want to get advice from colleagues, or you just want to share pictures of unicorns. Check them out.

Donate, or give a grant, to Vu's organization, Rainier Valley Corps, which has the mission of bringing more leaders of color into the nonprofit sector and getting diverse communities to work together to address systemic issues.

Related

Our hiring practices are inequitable and need to change
Hi everyone, I just returned from giving a keynote speech in at the Chatham-Kent Nonprofit Network's annual conference (in Ontario Canada) called "We Are Uni-
April 27, 2015
In "nonprofit field"



Hey, can we be a little nicer to job applicants and stop treating them like crap?
April 18, 2016
In "leadership"



When you don't disclose salary range on a job posting, a unicorn loses its wings
June 1, 2015
In "Finance"

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This entry was posted in nonprofit field, Office Culture, Unicorns and tagged hiring process, HR, job posting, nonprofit, personnel on May 8, 2017 [<http://nonprofitaf.com/2017/05/19-tips-for-making-your-job-posting-so-amazing-unicorns-will-weep-tears-of-joy/>] by Vu.

29 thoughts on "19 tips for making your job posting so amazing, unicorns will weep tears of joy"

Kristen Porter
May 8, 2017 at 4:28 am

#20, DO NOT post your volunteer opportunity in the JOBS section! Especially on job sites that have a volunteer section. Or even worse, DO NOT call your volunteer opportunity a job! This is a confusing waste of time for job seekers who have to read through every job posting just to find out if they will get paid for the job or not!

Hungry for Lunch

May 8, 2017 at 7:40 am

This is more for job listing sites than posters, but I'm looking at you LinkedIn: make it easy to separate volunteer "jobs" from paid work. It's really insulting to nonprofit professionals to have half the search results be volunteer opportunities with no way of screening them out easily—if you try to exclude the word "volunteer" then you miss job descriptions that include working with volunteers or talk about the role volunteers play in the organization description.

Kristen Porter

May 8, 2017 at 4:46 am

#21 (Kind of goes with #2) ALWAYS list the language requirements. This is a key part of the job description. I'm not sure why it's ever left out. If your job posting is in one language and you require more than that language to be spoken to do the job, then be clear about that. I have shown up to so many interviews (yes, think about all the work that goes into getting to that point) just to find out that I need to be fluent in a language(s) that I am not. Another huge time waster for both job seeker and employer.

Cloggie

May 16, 2017 at 2:48 pm

They didn't notice that you didn't list that language on your resume? Seems like you might have run into other problems with an employer that isn't reading applications for the skills they want.

I've had employers contact me to do a quick call to see how fluent I was in a language because even saying a level of fluency can be subjective. They didn't want to interview someone below a specific level and I appreciated the screening, even if I didn't make the cut.

Kristen Porter

May 22, 2017 at 8:24 am

No they did not. They didn't even post what languages were needed on the posting in the first place. This has happened to me a few times now. Calling you seems like a reasonable practice that doesn't waste a lot of time.

Cloggie

May 23, 2017 at 5:31 am

Perhaps you're dodging a bullet with a disorganized employer if they can't get themselves together enough to put all required skills in a job posting. Who knows what else they forgot to mention?

Yes, the call was very reasonable. Quick and easy, even if it disqualified me.

Julie Payne

May 8, 2017 at 5:06 am

Please remember that some of us just joining the sector may not have 5 years of work experience, but have earned a degree or national certification in nonprofit leadership, lending 2-4 years of experience learning and practicing learned skills. I have met development directors with 10+ years of experience who cannot create their own event budgets, have no idea how to utilize Facebook or add simple updates to their websites, and who write the same thank you letter to every donation every time.

betty barcode

May 8, 2017 at 5:26 am

Also: everyone who applies deserves two personal communications from you: a kind acknowledgement that you received their application and a kind notification after you hired someone else. None of this "We'll be back in touch only if we think you're worth interviewing." And never, "Dear applicant." Use their names.

Sherrie Smith

May 8, 2017 at 7:12 pm

I think that a timeline posted is pretty sufficient. You know if you don't get a call by this date then you're not going to get a call.

Expecting some agencies to respond to dozens of applications, maybe even hundreds, is not very realistic.

betty barcode

May 9, 2017 at 5:28 am

And yet with most modern email services, it isn't that laborious. A few years back during the economic crash, I had a part-time paraprofessional position to fill. I posted it widely and got about 50 applicants, one with a PhD and several from out of state. You jolly well bet each applicant got an individual message after we made our selection. Yes, it was a copy-n-paste, changing out the applicant's name in the salutation each time, but it took under an hour.

Cloggie

May 16, 2017 at 1:18 pm

You can do it even faster with mail merge (depending on which email platform you use).

Josh

May 8, 2017 at 6:44 am

Vu, another thoughtful post. It might be helpful in a future one (perhaps in a sister post) to chat with a few folks in HR depts or on executive teams who don't regularly follow your suggestions in order to better understand why. While laziness and inertia likely explain some of the behavior, wondering if there are other barriers that you could call out and help organizations to better address going forward? Maybe call the post something like "Why good nonprofits post bad job descriptions"...only catchier 😊

Hungry for Lunch

May 8, 2017 at 7:12 am

Yes, as one example I suspect that many organizations use online systems to collect some demographic information and to help verify that they're attracting a wide and diverse pool of candidates, as well as complying with any anti-discrimination laws. But I am interested in understanding why that online system ALSO has to be con-

figured to require the exact calendar date that I left a job twelve years ago, or the address of a place that no longer exists along with the defunct phone number of the person who retired in 2012.

todustodus

May 10, 2017 at 1:04 pm

As a jobseeker with a disability, it'd actually be quite interesting to have this demographic information posted on each organization's website careers page, semi-anonymized, but still transparent.

When I apply for a job online, organizations tend to insist on my providing demographic data (gender, age, disability, veteran status, etc. ad nauseam) and they spout the EOE language which suggests but does not confirm that they're seriously interested in diverse hires.

How about you — generally meant — show me your numbers for the past year that you've actually considered and / or hired candidates who are: low income and / or have a disability and / or are older and / or whatever other diversity-equity-inclusion criteria. For instance, in the past calendar year, we had 2 job openings, received 48 applicants for the first job and 23 applicants for the second job. Self-identified data indicate that 14% of candidates had a disability; 50% were female; 3% were veterans. Our finalists were an African-American woman between the age of 30 and 40, a returned veteran between the age of 20 and 30 with PTSD and a white able-bodied middle-class dude between age of 30 and 40 and we chose [...]

You get the idea; I'd be open to other classifications, however it's done. Providing this data might encourage me and others to apply or it might give both the organization and the candidate a truer picture of what's really going on in terms of hiring practices.

To be clear, I'm absolutely no HR expert by any means, but I do think reasonably anonymized data might show whether an organization is giving lip service in its outreach to diverse candidates / finalists / etc. or if it's sincere in its efforts.

Sean Hale

May 8, 2017 at 10:15 am

Great suggestion, Josh.

Toni Panetta

May 8, 2017 at 3:04 pm

One of the hiccups I've run into is being open to flexibility in how the position is filled changes the benefits that are available and the compensation. What are the ramifications of listing benefits or compensation for FTE positions if the organization will accept part-time or contract candidates?

Have also run into a desire to post hiring ranges, then realizing the organization doesn't have an internal compensation range for titles/grades or is under a salary freeze. Hiring someone at the low end of a hiring range allows to hire a candidate with less experience but who has growth potential for merit increase without a title change; hiring someone at the higher end of a hiring range limits professional growth paths if the organization isn't budgeted to increase pay & change title to the next grade (i.e., from associate to manager).

Mehitabel

May 8, 2017 at 6:53 am

If you have no intention of acknowledging receipt of resumes, or of contacting or following up with applicants who aren't selected for interviews, say so right up front in your job posting, so people will know that they should not expect these courtesies from you.

Jessie

May 8, 2017 at 8:15 am

If you interview a candidate have the decency to follow up, with a personal call, to let them if they are not selected. An email is cold and impersonal.

We all know how busy Non Profits can be but be thoughtful enough to NOT TAKE your cell phone into a meeting. I was in the middle of an interview and the woman took a call. Seriously? Soon after she graced me with her attention again I thanked her and her colleague for their "time" and said that I did not feel the position would be a good fit for me. If you treat a potential staff like dirt in an interview I can guarantee it will not improve once you get hired.

Nikki Ringenberg

May 8, 2017 at 8:32 am

RE follow up after an interview – I've gone both ways on the email vs call, but lately I've landed on the email which (from me at least) always includes the offer of a phone call and/or meeting to discuss anything the candidate may wish to ask (and when applicable, encourage them to apply for other positions). I've found that candidates will take the call and not be prepared for being told they aren't the right candidate, but appreciate the email with the opportunity to reflect and receive insight/information when they've processed some. I might be wrong, and I'm completely open to expanding my understanding of the process, especially this piece.

AnnFeeney

May 8, 2017 at 2:43 pm

As somebody who's been on both the hiring manager and the job hunter end, I agree with Nikki. Somebody who wasn't accepted might need time to process their disappointment or to think about questions that they want to ask. A phone call puts them on the spot.

As long as the email is written with the human touch (and it sounds like that's exactly what Nikki does), it isn't necessarily cold.

Sherrie Smith

May 8, 2017 at 7:17 pm

Personally I'm fine receiving a rejection email. I do not need to have some awkward phone conversation about it.

I do think it's nice to be open to have questions – a person may want to know why they weren't selected, and being open to providing feedback about that kind of thing is super cool.

Mark T

May 9, 2017 at 9:26 pm

Hell I'd settle for just contacting me after an interview in anyway possible. In my last job search, approximately 75% of the places I had in person interviews with never responded after the interview to tell me I didn't get the job.

There was one place that had a 90 minute phone interview and a 6 hour in person series of interviews (the entire staff interviewed me in 30 min increments) and never contacted me. I found out when I saw the job reposted about 6 months later.

PJ Morley

May 8, 2017 at 8:37 am

Do NOT require a car when the job does not require actually driving around! I see this so often, "license and vehicle required" for an office job which may require going off-site a handful of times per year. This discriminates against those who cannot drive for a variety of reasons, as well as those of us who refuse to be part of car culture.

Cloggie

May 16, 2017 at 2:42 pm

I have seen that listed for jobs that seemed to have no ties to driving. Also, they were located in Manhattan where transit options abound 24/7 and parking is impossible.

Patrick Taylor

May 8, 2017 at 8:56 am

To add to #8, this is an area where many orgs could really use some work. If you want good people to work for you, you have to interview them and offer them jobs within a relatively short time frame. I've known some organizations that wait three months before even doing the initial calls, by which point many of the really good candidates will already have found other jobs. You are competing for talent – act accordingly.

The other thing I'd add is to be wary of concentrating too much on a candidate's experience with the subject matter of your particular organization when hiring for more entry level admin positions. Yes, the person scheduling meetings and doing admin work should care about the mission of the organization, but if you only hire people with Master's degrees in the subject area of your org, they are going to be disappointed when two years on they are still scheduling meetings and not on the front lines doing program work.

AnnFeeney

May 8, 2017 at 3:00 pm

Be honest and specific about the growth potential or career path for the role.

I'd also emphasize that it's important for diversity to be clear about what qualifications are required, what's preferred, and what's bonus. Often women assume that all skills listed are required and so don't apply unless they have all or nearly all of them, while men are more likely to apply if they have some of the requirements.

As a final touch, make sure that the ad's wording reflects the role and the personality and values you want to see in the candidates. If you list "guru," "expert," or "ninja," those words are more likely to attract people who work better alone and acting as a consultant to a team, which is great if that's really the role, but not so good if the person is going to be embedded in a team.

Sherrie Smith

May 8, 2017 at 7:11 pm

All great points!

And BTW – that first piece of artwork is from "The Last Unicorn" – where she is speaking to a butterfly that speaks only in song.

Cloggie

May 16, 2017 at 3:04 pm

Now to get the powers that be to take these suggestions to heart. When I left my previous position I got a lot of push-back when I rewrote the job description, since it had been written by HR when the job was different. I even cited this blog! To no avail. The CEO (yeah, the CEO should not be nitpicking this, hence my departure) wanted something more corporate sounding. this is why it took them nearly 7 months to find my replacement.

frozen_north

August 2, 2017 at 11:02 am

Just wanted to say I haven't ever commented, but I do come back to your posts (like this one!) regularly. Thank you!

Comments are closed.

