



# Hire POWER

The U.S. job market has been gathering steam for months, and more and more workers are back in the hunt for their next career opportunity. **Associations are uniquely positioned to meet the demand.** With the candidate pool looking better than ever, how can you attract the best talent to your organization?

BY GAYLE BENNETT



**N**ot only did the Great Recession live up to its name, but in an insult-to-injury move, it was followed by an economic hangover in which jobs and wages remained stubbornly stagnant. Thankfully, the country is emerging from this economic malaise.

Job growth appears to be on a slow march upward, and the unemployment rate has fallen to its lowest level since 2008. And associations are a part of this job creation story. According to Nonprofit HR's Nonprofit Employment Practices Survey, 50 percent of associations expect to create positions this year, along with 36 percent of private-sector companies.

But it's not quite a candidates' market yet. The economic uncertainty of the last few years caused many employees who would have otherwise moved on to other jobs to stay put, says Jennifer Loftus, national director of Astron Solutions, a human resources consulting firm. Now they may be thinking about making a change. Add this group of people to the unemployed and recently graduated, and that's a healthy pool of job hunters.

While a larger pool of prospects can mean a greater chance of finding well-qualified candidates, weeding through an onslaught of resumes is time-consuming. And there is the risk that more is merely more. How can associations ensure they are getting quality candidates among the quantity?

Going back to basics—with a few tweaks to account for our current, tech-driven times—can help. By paying more attention to each piece of the hiring process, from the distribution of the job posting to the interview questions, associations large and small can attract and ultimately hire candidates who are best suited to the role and the organization.

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### Playing to Your Strengths

According to Loftus, a job has five reward elements: compensation, benefits, work-life balance, career development and advancement, and recognition. While associations often can't compete with the private sector on pay, they can usually meet or exceed expectations in the other four areas.

Associations tend to offer good benefits packages, and they can often offer employees a breadth of experience related to an industry as well as exposure to a variety of organizational

functions, particularly if the staff is small. And recognizing good work is something every organization can do well if it tries.

Where associations appear to have a particular edge, however, is work-life balance. “We get a lot of people who are ready to make a change from a for-profit environment, where they will give up salary dollars for a better work-life balance,” says Janet McNichol, CAE, human resources director at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). “People in non-

profits work hard too, but if you were working a 70- or 80-hour work week, you don't really mind working 45."

The Healthcare Distribution Management Association allows employees to have flexible work schedules, and several of its 40 employees telecommute. In addition, HDMA leadership is understanding and flexible when parents face child care issues, to the point of letting older children come to work with their parents a day or two during spring break, for example. "I know there are a couple employees that have stayed on based on that fact," says Linda Caporaletti-Hoyt, HDMA's vice president of human resources.

Even with these inherent pluses, associations shouldn't rest on their laurels, warns Michael Cummings, principal of Tate/Cummings, an association consulting firm. "The associations that are really attracting the top talent are those that get that working at the association is like a product and needs to put its best foot forward," he says. He suggests that associations have a recruitment section on their website, possibly with videos of staff members describing the benefits of working for the organization.

### Finding Good Candidates

In 2004, Rockville, Maryland-based ASHA hired 37 people, and 16 of those people came through a *Washington Post* ad. A lot has changed in 10 years: "In 2014, we hired 34 people, and one person came from *The Washington Post*," says McNichol. "We have all kinds of sources that we used in 2014 that we didn't use in 2004."

One of those sources is staff referrals, which isn't a new tactic but has been made much easier with the proliferation of social media. "When we post our jobs internally, we actively encourage our staff to push it out to their networks," says Megan Trainor, HR director for the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies (NAMIC) in Indianapolis. "There's a \$500 reward for those who submit a candidate for consideration that actually gets hired."

Using employees as de facto recruiters also offers an inherent endorsement of the association,

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Cummings says. "If I hate my job, am I really going to convince my friend to come work there? Of course not. The primary way to avoid a deluge of resumes is being more proactive with your staff recruitment."

Another proactive strategy is good, old-fashioned networking. "To position your organization most strongly, you should be networking and building that database, knowing the people and kinds of people you would want working for you" before the need arises, Loftus says. "As you are meeting people and talking to them, you are noting that this person has the competencies and skills that would fit in well with your organization." She recommends connecting with these people through LinkedIn. "There's nothing magical about that, but it helps you keep track of talented individuals."

Caporaletti-Hoyt is active in her local HR chapter, a good networking channel for her. "Usually at our HR chapter meetings we stand up and say if we have an HR position open. I stood up and said, 'I have an entry-level administration position open, and I've not really been able to find someone.'" Another member's daughter was job hunting; she applied and has been with HDMA for a year now.

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# SPREADING THE WORD

One way to ensure that top-notch candidates apply for your openings is to help them get a sense of your workplace. Applying to be a “best place to work” and encouraging employees—and even job candidates—to share their experiences on social media can help brand your association as the great place to work you know it to be.

## Determining Fit

If social media is playing a bigger role in getting good candidates to apply, is it also helping to determine who would fit into the organization? A little, but the resume and cover letter are still the primary vetting tools.

“I do take time to look at the cover letter,” Caporaletti-Hoyt says. “So much of any position is communication.”

Trainor agrees. “Everyone here has to be able to string together a sentence, and the cover letter is one primary way of figuring that out.” She, like others, uses LinkedIn profiles to find out more about a candidate, but not to the point of replacing the resume.

The job interview is still vitally important, and to better determine fit, savvy associations have switched up some interview questions. After talking with the the hiring manager about what qualities are necessary in a particular job, Trainor and her colleagues at NAMIC develop questions that focus on determining a candidate’s emotional intelligence.

“We are always looking for people who are emotionally mature and versatile,” Trainor says. “We use these emotional intelligence questions to help us determine cultural fit.” An example of such a question: Tell me about a situation in which you had to deliver bad news to your manager. How did you go about planning for that meeting?

“What you are finding out is if they are taking time to figure out how to deliver that bad news,” Trainor says. “Do they know how to plan a conversation so that it goes well or as well as can be expected?”

McNichol says that ASHA now takes a motivation-based approach to interviewing, which aims to determine whether a candidate has both the skills and the desire to do the work. In a motivation-based interview, the candidates field a series of questions that highlight how they handle obstacles. A sample question could be, “Tell me about a time you had to redo a colleague’s job.” A follow-up question could be, “How did

**Best Places to Work.** The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association has been listed as a *Washington Post* Top Workplace and has received the seal of approval from the Alliance for Workplace Excellence. This recognition drives candidates to ASHA: “People will just find our website because of a lot of the employer branding things we’ve done,” says Janet McNichol, CAE, ASHA’s human resources director.

Just applying to be a “best place to work” can be a helpful process. “We never entered the Best Places to Work in Indiana program necessarily to try to win it or to place well,” says Gregg Dykstra, COO and general counsel of the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies. “Our initial involvement in the program was simply as a reality check, a benchmark for our own internal practices and what we could be doing better to attract and retain employees.” This year, NAMIC placed second in the category of companies with between 75 and 249 U.S. employees.

**Glassdoor.** The job search website Glassdoor allows employees and interview candidates to review the organizations they work for or interviewed at. NAMIC embraces these reviews. “I think more and more candidates are looking to sources like Glassdoor.com to get a glimpse of what it’s like inside an organization,” says Megan Trainor, NAMIC’s HR director. “We’ve tried to encourage people to put a review out there. We won’t know who they are—anonymous is the way to go—but it’s served us well. We’ve had potential candidates say that they’ve read our reviews on Glassdoor.”

Consultant Michael Cummings points out that the internet hates a void. “Employers need to be part of this conversation about their employer brand, because if they’re not, the story’s going to be told without them.”  
—G.B.

you handle this with your supervisor and the colleague?”

“A lot of times you have someone who is perfectly capable of doing the work, but they aren’t motivated to for whatever reason,” she says. “So with the motivation-based interviewing, you are trying to ask questions in a way that lets you pick up on whether someone would be excited to do this work.”

With a honed recruitment and vetting process, associations will be better able to hire the talent they need

to best serve their members. And if it’s a good fit, they might not have to hire again for a while.

“I think trade associations are one of the best-kept secrets” of the job market, Caporaletti-Hoyt says. “I think they are hard to get into because once people get into them, people realize they are a good gig, and they don’t leave.”

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