

What To Consider As An Internal Candidate

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Internal candidacy needs to be undertaken with the same discernment and preparation as external candidacy.

Being an internal candidate has its benefits in terms of knowledge of the institution, its issues, and its dynamics. But being an internal candidate has particular challenges as well. While many internal candidates may think more readily about what happens if you don't get the job (do you stay or do you go? How do you show up the next day and how do you respond when people talk to you about the new appointee), give serious thought to what happened if you DO get the job. People know you in your current role. Will they be able to relate to you in your new role?

Consider how the position you seek is different from the position you currently hold. Why do you want to do that work, and how will it change the working relationships you currently have?

Internal candidates should make the effort to speak with the search consultant sooner rather than later. You should be prepared to address your interest in the opportunity, and how you believe that your skills and experience prepare you to do the work expected of the appointee. Given your experience at the institution, be thoughtful also about your commitment to the institution and what prompts you to want to continue to serve the institution.

Ask about the process and confidentiality. To the degree possible, internal candidates should expect to be treated the same as other candidates. That is, you are due the same degree of confidentiality as other candidates and should be provided the same information regarding the search process as is provided to other candidates.

Planning for internal candidacy:

Be discerning about meetings you attend where the search will be a topic of discussion. General announcements or discussions about the search prior to the formal start of the search process should be fine, but avoid meetings that are part of the search process and designed to inform development of the search profile/prospectus, where colleagues will be discussing their views on the needs and expectations for the person coming into the position.

Do not openly mention or discuss your thinking about applying. (Open discussion often creates the perception that you are campaigning for the position or lobbying for support.)

Limit discussions, if needed, to a small handful of trusted mentors or colleagues who can help you think through the opportunity and your potential candidacy.

Do not volunteer or accept appointment to the search committee until or unless you are sure you will NOT be a candidate.

Once the position profile or prospectus is available, read it carefully. Don't assume that you know what you need to based on prior experience with the person in that position. Before applying, make sure you meet the required qualifications (e.g., if they want to appoint someone at the rank of professor, do you hold that rank?) Do you have a preponderance of the desired skills and experience, or others that prepare you to meet the challenges and opportunities of the position? Focus your cover letter on the expectations for the position and how your experience demonstrates your readiness to do the work.

Be sure that your CV includes a scope of responsibilities as well as a list of outcomes and accomplishments for each of your leadership roles. Do not assume that everyone on campus understands the nature of your role and the work you do. Your application materials are your first chance to position yourself for how you want current colleagues to see you in the role you seek.

Be thoughtful about developing a list of references. Your list should not include anyone on the search committee or anyone in the hiring line. Look for people who can speak not just to the effectiveness of the work you have done but also to the skills and experience you bring to the work you would be doing in the new position. Look at the details of the position description, including the challenges and opportunities you would face and the desired experience and attributes, and consider who is well positioned – internally or externally – to speak to your capacity in those areas.

Once you have decided to be a candidate, notify the search consultant or hiring authority or committee chair so that they can protect the confidentiality of your candidacy and help you navigate the process. Determine when to alert your supervisor. Once you submit your application materials, the members of the committee will know of your candidacy of course but, beyond that, no one else should know about it until or unless you get to a public phase of the search (usually a finalist interview). And if you don't advance to a public finalist interview, there is no reason that your candidacy should become known. Ever.

In the event you advance through the process to an on-campus finalist interview, you should plan to be absent from campus on the days of other interviews.

If you do not advance to the on-campus finalist interview, you might participate in the campus visits as is appropriate to your role on campus. In the case of the candidate who is the interim in the position, the search consultant should discuss with the hiring authority if/how the person would meet with candidates being interviewed.

Do not expect special consideration as an internal candidate. To be credible in the new role, you want to be selected for your skills, experience, and aptitude, and because you stood up well to the competition, not just because people know and like you.