



AESC Client Bill of Rights

What Should Clients Look For In An Executive Search Firm?

Introducing new leaders can have a significant impact on market perception, consumer confidence and employee engagement. Choosing the right executive search firm is a critical business decision with long-term impact. What are your rights and obligations as a client?

For more than 50 years, the Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants (AESC) has set the standards for the profession. AESC members are ethical, experienced and committed to excellence. You can expect the following when working with an AESC member.

I. The executive search firm provides clients with an accurate and candid assessment of its capabilities to perform your search.

That assessment includes a firm's internal resources, knowledge of the function and industry in which the search will be conducted, and an understanding of the client's cultural or regulatory environment.

Before agreeing to undertake any search, the professional executive search firm:

- Verifies that it has the resources, time, and expertise
- Discloses circumstances that may create actual or potential conflicts of interest
- Defines with the client which part of the organization is the "client" (i.e. which subsidiary, division, etc.) and establishes any off-limits provisions
- Defines the scope and character of the services to be provided and the fees and expenses to be charged

II. The executive search firm is forthcoming about the client team.

Clients should be sure to meet with the individual consultant and the team who will handle the search assignment. The forthcoming executive search firm:

- Provides full and open disclosure regarding the consultants performing the search and their ability to successfully handle the assignment
- Discloses the resources the firm has available to support the consultant and team working on the project
- Defines the sourcing strategy

III. The executive search firm develops a thorough understanding of the organization and its hiring objectives.

Effective, successful searches require that the consultant possess a deep knowledge and understanding of a client's unique executive talent needs, organizational culture, customer strategy and regulatory challenges. In order to clarify search requirements, a thorough firm also:

- Confirms the client's desired level and type of candidate experience
- Identifies the background, education and technical skills required

- Lists responsibilities and interpersonal and other skills required for success
- Captures the client’s diversity goals and documents steps to achieve them

As trusted advisors, search firms help their clients develop, modify and refine their own understanding of the position to be filled, and explore the opportunities to acquire new skills and aptitudes that a vacancy might present.

IV. The executive search firm provides a high-level consultative relationship.

An executive search firm works in partnership with a client to help define the assignment, identify candidates, assess using sophisticated methodology and select those best suited through comprehensive, quality-assured search processes. Part of the consultative relationship requires that the search firm:

- Prepares a highly detailed agreement that specifies roles and responsibilities; clarifies expectations, limitations, and restrictions; and anticipates conditions and situations that may evolve, and the appropriate responses to each
- Agrees in advance that background checks will be conducted and academic degrees verified, when they take place and who is responsible for conducting them
- Delivers market research based on a specific talent profile and competitors’ market position and activities
- Evaluates current recruiting strategies and provides new ones
- Communicates the business case for diversity and shares best practices

V. The executive search firm holds client information in strict confidence.

The executive search process requires that clients divulge highly sensitive information. The ethical search consultant treats any and all information with the utmost confidentiality while still providing necessary information to candidates. To protect client interests, an ethical search firm:

- Uses confidential client information exclusively for the purposes of conducting the assignment
- Discloses client information only to those within the search firm who are working on the assignment, or candidates who have a direct need to know
- Never uses confidential information for personal gain
- Never provides information to third parties for their personal gain

Executive search firms who adhere to the [AESC Code of Professional Practice](#) and [Standards of Excellence](#) have made a commitment to protecting client and candidate confidentiality, thereby preserving their own integrity and that of the profession.

VI. The best executive search firms provide clients with regular, detailed status reports on the progress of the search.

Depending on the position to be filled, the availability of talent, and a host of other factors, a successful search can take anywhere from a few weeks to several months. To ensure effective, ongoing communication the executive search firm:

- Shares the market response to the search

- Identifies obstacles to finding or attracting candidates
- Lists candidates being developed
- Communicates openly if it becomes apparent that the search as defined cannot be successfully completed, and needs to be reevaluated or adjusted

VII. The executive search firm presents qualified candidates who fit the position and the culture of the client organization.

Executive search consultants present a range of qualified candidates, and for each candidate the effective firm presents:

- Experience and achievements relative to the position to be filled
- Education and background
- Intellectual, interpersonal and motivation competencies
- Personal strengths and weaknesses with respect to the position to be filled
- Perceived cultural fit
- Interest in the position and remuneration and financial expectations

One aspect of the search consultant's partnership with clients is assisting with their internal review of candidates, including interviewing techniques that avoid unconscious gender bias.

VIII. The executive search firm is invested in the entire process and helps the client negotiate with the final candidate.

Once a client has selected a final candidate, the role of the executive search consultant evolves from that of search agent to negotiator and communicator. In order to best represent the client and increase the likelihood that the candidate will accept an offer, the search firm:

- Acts as client advocate and intermediary between client and candidate regarding compensation, benefits and other conditions of employment
- Shares with the client any reservations or concerns the candidate may have
- Helps the candidate to assess the opportunity
- Works with both sides to create a "win" for everyone

An executive search firm recognizes that their behavior reflects directly on the client, and can influence the likelihood that a candidate will accept the client's offer.

IX. The executive search firm provides clients with a clear understanding of any replacement policies and other unusual situations that may arise during and after the search.

The executive search consultant provides in writing an explanation of the firm's policy regarding possible outcomes. These include:

- The search firm's obligations and responsibilities to clients if a newly recruited professional leaves the client company for any reason within an agreed period of time
- The client's obligations to the search firm should they hire a candidate presented during the current engagement for a position other than the assigned vacancy

- The conditions under which the search firm can withdraw from a client assignment or consider an assignment sufficiently changed to begin a new search
- Conditions around which the search firm is unable to fulfill an assignment after the search has begun

X. The executive search firm commits to follow-through.

As a trusted advisor, the executive search firm's responsibility does not end when the candidate accepts an offer. A committed executive search firm:

- Assists with onboarding and integration
- Contributes to a smooth transition for candidates
- Remains in communication with the new hire for a period of time for support
- Determines with the client that a search is indeed concluded

How can clients maximize the value of the relationship?

Because executive search is a specialized form of management consulting, retaining an executive search firm for an exclusive assignment is a strategic decision. In order to maximize the benefit of that relationship, clients:

- Select an executive search partner with tremendous care and diligence
- Set clear expectations and establish an understanding of the agreement with special attention to conflicts, restrictions, and other provisions
- Provide full and accurate information on the position and the organization
- Proactively address concerns during the course of the assignment
- Communicate fully, clearly, and openly

CONCLUSION

The competition for top executive personnel is intense, and the stakes have never been higher. Trust and integrity are at the core of a successful relationship and a successful search. Clients are wise to choose gold-standard firms at the top of the profession, and should partner only with firms that are committed to professional excellence in executive search and leadership consulting: [members of AESC](#).