



AMN HEALTHCARE Executive and Physician Leadership Search Practice

Executive and Physician Search in a Coronavirus Pandemic: Wider Use of Video Conferencing to Reduce Travel, Economic Cost, and Risk of Viral Exposure

Advantages: lower cost/ mitigates risk of travel disruption, geographic barriers, and risks of group-related infectious agent transmission / candidate confidentiality breach is less likely/mitigates loss of candidate productivity

Overview:

Video interviewing has been extensively used in non- executive recruiting and physician search for many years. It is only recently that it has begun to migrate into higher level executive and C-suite searches. One driver of this momentum is its value as a “lean” search process which can speed the pace of a search, reduce costs, and better maintain candidate confidentiality. Given the heightened public health concerns about transmissibility of Coronavirus (leading to COVID-19) and its global spread, air travel and conferences are being more widely considered and adopted.

As sustained transmission of the virus in U.S. continues, the CDC and other concerned agencies and organizations are recommending the cancellation of mass gatherings and increased telework and remote meeting options (citation 1, *MMWR*, 69(8) 216-219, 2020). This is also referred to as “social distancing.”

For these reasons, AMN’s Executive and Physician Leadership Search Practice proposes approaches and options that use our current technology to reduce in-person contact, including personal contact between candidates and Search Committees, during the initial search phases. Contact can be maintained using an interactive platform which integrates web-based video interviewing and document repositories.

Video interviewing currently has two main applications: 1) for screening and interviewing candidates by search firms; and 2) as a platform for first round candidate interviews. Prior to videoconferencing, candidates were screened by in-person interviews which often involved the search consultants flying to another city to meet the candidate at considerable cost both financially and temporally; or by phone interviews, which limit the consultant’s ability to assess the candidate’s executive presence and bearing.

The second application for which video technology is gaining acceptance is use at what was previously called the “airport” or “first round” interview stage. It was common that a Search Committee would interview 6 to 8 candidates in rapid succession at a neutral location, such as an airport hotel, to facilitate convenient ingress and egress of candidates. In this setting, confidentiality could be compromised if two candidates happened to cross paths in the airport, and the financial and temporal costs absorbed by the recruiting institution and Search Committee could be significant.



Boston
62 Derby Street, Suite 1
Hingham, MA 02043
781-740-9699

| Chicago | Atlanta | Los Angeles | Philadelphia | Dallas

In the last 4 years, replacing the “airport” interview process with a video-based platform has gained wider acceptance. Using this methodology, the Search Committee interviews candidates in a serial fashion from a conference room, with the candidate’s real-time streaming image on a large screen at one end of the room.

The candidate participates from their office or an assigned professional video conference center, and has a real-time streaming image of the conference room and Search Committee on their screen. In both situations, best practice involves the use of pre-determined behavior-based questions, and reserving time for the candidate to make inquiries of the Search Committee about the opportunity. Tectonic changes in healthcare leading to downward-trending health system margins, and greater pressure on candidate’s clinical and scientific productivity, argue for greater exploration of potential efficiencies through even broader application of video conferencing in the executive search process.

The areas that video platforms are being used in currently, or can be extended to, include:

- Search Committee Kick-Off and Charge Meeting
- Discovery/Due Diligence interviews with Stakeholders
- Candidate screening*
- Bio-Review/ Long list review meeting with Search Committee
- First round interviews with Search Committee**
- Second and third round campus visits- ideally, these critical interviews should be structured so that the candidates visit the campus and have a personalized experience to assess mutual fit. Increasing restrictions on travel are pushing institutions to conduct these interviews to video platforms as well.

The Virtual Search Committee

Search Committees are commonly used in academic cultures to ensure diversity of thought and stakeholder representation as well as fairness. Search Committees are advisory to the hiring authority, such as the Dean or CEO, who makes the final decision on which of the finalist candidates to negotiate with and he or she sets the parameters on desired phenotype during the Search Kickoff meeting, where the “charge” is delivered to the Search Committee.

Our recommendation for the Search Committee size is 10 people or fewer, to allow for nimbleness and creation of a functional team culture. For a virtual Search Committee, we suggest that an even smaller number of seasoned peer-level stakeholders be chosen. Given the greater challenges to build a team culture over the video platform, consideration should be given to appointing leaders who have worked well together on previous teams. They should be versatile and adaptive in order to adjust to the novel technology platform.

Search Committee Chair

The Chair, or often Co-Chairs, need strong leadership skills to not only guide the committee, but also ensure fairness and help build a positive and effective team culture in a relatively short time. They lead by influence and make sure that biases are recognized and managed, and that insights from quieter members are harvested and appreciated.

The Chair(s) should: encourage nominations from the Search Committee and other Department members, communicate and instill confidence within the Department/Division/School that a national search is underway and that a fair process is being used, and assure that confidentiality is respected. They should understand and remind the Committee that their job is not to pick the next leader, but to put forward the list of finalists to the hiring authority.

Search Committee Staff

The best Staffers are highly organized, and motivated to achieve the mission of the search. They will schedule meetings and interviews in appropriate venues, work with executive assistants of Search Committee Members to optimize availability for meetings. They will also pre-schedule the search timeline in concert with search consultants at the start of the search, prepare travel itineraries and liaise with the search firm project coordinator on candidate interview travel itineraries, prepare documents for Search Committee meetings, and schedule update calls between consultants and Chair(s).

They should arrange for call-in lines and AV technology, as appropriate. They will provide Search Committee contact information and bios to AMN team, and help manage communications at all levels. Since they may be involved in meeting candidates during campus interviews, they should have good interpersonal skills.

Search Committee Members

Search Committee Members should understand that their role is advisory and they are tasked with recommending and screening and not selection or hiring. They should be listeners and evaluators on behalf of the institution. It is important that they read submitted candidate materials and prepare for meetings and contribute to discussions. Members should also play a recruiting role as well and commit to confidentiality about the search process.

Conducting Virtual Meetings

The quality of most videoconference platforms is robust and can support reliable video and audio signal transmission with minimal disruption and signal delay. It is estimated that an interview conducted on a video platform provides about 80% of the visual information gleaned from an in-person interview.

The main challenges of Search Committee meetings on a video platform are encouragement of free flowing, productive discussion and participation from all members. These challenges can be addressed by following a few principles: 1) allow speakers to finish; 2) ask for recognition before speaking, and 3) remember to keep comments brief.

It has become commonplace to conduct panel interviews with the candidate on a video platform with the entire Search Committee in the same room seated around a table. The complexity of the process dramatically increases if the candidate and entire Search Committee are all remote. In the former instance, while interviewing candidates, the Chair(s) will orchestrate the assignment and order of questions prior to the start of the interview and manage the time, so that the total interview time is the same between all candidates.

The candidates are coached on the approximate number of questions they will be asked, but not the question content, within a given timeframe, so they can budget the duration of their answers. The Search Committee is given pre-printed question sets on which they can record the candidate's answers and refer to during deliberation. In the latter case, with both the candidate and Search Committee connecting via video, a similar highly coordinated experience is also possible.

AMN's video platform is configured so the Chair(s) will have access to a text program that can message Search Committee Members in real-time during the interview and can suggest follow-up questions or change the question order. The same platform can also generate a transcript of the interview which can augment memory and notetaking and lead to a fairer process during Committee deliberations.

Summary and Recommendations

The global spread of Coronavirus has created new challenges for the American health system that will require heightened leadership agility and forward thinking during this time of uncertainty. Health system and academic leaders need to adjust recruitment tactics accordingly to attract the best physician and scientific executives to their organizations.

We present options that leverage AMN's technology and search expertise to manage client organizational economic cost and the viral exposure risks of air travel and in-person group meetings while still providing a highly effective executive search process.

A large piece of the executive search process can be modified to minimize travel and in-person meetings. Face-to-face connections are still important to determining fit for both the candidate and the client organization. Our proposed "videosearch" approach preserves in-person contact for the final rounds of the search process, after significant vetting has occurred. This process will be reassuring to the candidates and Search Committee Members, who will feel that the institution respects their time and safety by lessening travel and in-person meetings, offering a time and cost-efficient solution for all parties.

Footnotes:

*Candidates are typically interviewed in-person, by phone, or on a video platform.

**Currently a 1:1 video link is frequently used between the candidate and the assembled in-person Search Committee, usually in a board room; we propose the use, under certain circumstances, of a multi-linked video platform between the candidate and a geographically dispersed Search Committee in other words, totally virtual.



Boston
62 Derby Street, Suite 1
Hingham, MA 02043
781-740-9699

| **Chicago** | **Atlanta** | **Los Angeles** | **Philadelphia** | **Dallas**