



**Big Brothers Big Sisters
of Canada**

Interview Guide for Hiring Executive Directors

April 2008



Introduction

This interview guide has been developed to help the Board of Directors of Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies interview candidates for the role of Executive Director (ED). This work was made possible through the generous funding of the HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector.

How This Guide Was Developed

This guide was developed in consultation with BBBS Executive Directors across Canada in both small and large agencies. These ED's participated in interviews to provide their thoughts on the competencies that were critical to being a high performing ED.

Their input was consolidated into a **Competency Profile (included as an Appendix)**. This profile was the basis on which interview questions were developed. Both the competency profile and the interview questions were validated by the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada Agency Services Team, and by representative ED's.

How to Use this Guide

The interview questions have been grouped under each competency area. Several questions have been developed for each competency. Depending on the length of the interview (typically one hour), you will have to be selective about which questions to ask. There are too many questions in this guide to ask all of them. However, given that some candidates may come back for a second (or even third) interview, you can stage questions across different meetings. Also, it is important to recognize that candidates will also want time to ask questions, and have a two-way dialogue so this has to be factored into the timing of the interview.

The following process is proposed:

1. Read the competency profile (the Appendix) to confirm your expectations of the ED role, and the type of person you are looking for (Note: the competency profile can be used as a resource for future onboarding and performance discussions after the ED is hired)
2. Review all of the interview questions, including the probes and desired responses
3. Select 5-7 questions that are the best fit for your agency. You do not need to limit yourself to the attached questions. Feel free to add other questions, or modify the ones attached.

You may also consider using one (or more) questions as the basis of a presentation given the importance of presentation skills in the ED role. An example, used in one BBBS agency, is included below.

Example of Presentation Requirement

The Committee requests that you please come prepared to make an opening presentation of no more than 15 minutes to address all of the following questions:

“Why are you interested in this position? What aspects of your career do you believe make you a good candidate for the role?”

With reference to the current “BBBS Strategic Plan” (to be provided to you shortly) – please identify 2 or 3 key challenges that you believe that BBBS and its Board will need to address in the near future. As the new Executive Director, how do you propose to help the organization address these challenges?”

4. Prioritize the questions into your own customized interview guide.
5. During the interview, take lots of notes. The interview committee should leave enough time between candidate interviews to compare notes, and try to achieve consensus on the candidate’s level of competency. **A Notes and Rating Sheet has been provided for this purpose at the end of the interview questions.**

Interview Guide for Executive Directors/Presidents

COMPETENCY

Optimistic Drive

The role of ED can be quite stressful at times. How do you maintain a healthy work/life balance and minimize stress?

Probes

- Can you describe a particularly stressful period in your current or past job? What was the situation, and how did you manage it?
- What personal strategies do you use to keep a healthy balance in your life, e.g. do you take all your vacation?
- As an ED, how do you anticipate helping your team maintain their work/life balance, and minimize burn-out?

Desired Response

- Demonstrates a healthy “work/life” balance; is committed to personal wellness and managing stress (e.g. takes vacation, makes time for family, friends, and personal interests)
- Is proactive in seeking help to resolve problems and challenges, e.g., develops a network of informal, trusted advisors both inside and outside the agency for advice and support

Can you describe a situation where you devoted considerable time, effort and resources to an effort that did not succeed (or to the extent you had hoped)?

Probes

- What was the situation?
- What was your role? What was the role and expectations of others in this event (e.g. other employees, board, volunteers)
- How did you maintain others’ confidence in you given the outcome was not what you had hoped for?
- What did you learn from the experience that could make a difference in the future?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates optimism, focus and tenacity especially in challenging or stressful situations to achieve the best outcomes; focuses on finding solutions rather than finding excuses not to succeed
- Learns from, and is not discouraged, by “failures”; does not dwell on past mistakes

COMPETENCY

Optimistic Drive

What are the many priorities and stakeholders that you are currently juggling at work?

Probes

- How do you balance these different demands? What strategy do you use?
- What type of work environment and culture gives you the most energy and excitement?

Desired Responses

- Enjoys a fast paced environment with multiple priorities and stakeholders; exercises sound judgment in determining the “right” priorities on which to focus on

COMPETENCY

Relationship and Public Relations

Can you tell us about an important mentor in your own life, and the difference he or she has made to your success?

Probes

- How has this personal experience shaped your own view about the importance of mentorship?
- What are the elements of mentorship that you would emphasize to attract volunteers or funders?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates passion about the mentoring movement
- Demonstrates the ability to clearly articulate 'why' people should support the mentoring movement

Increasingly, funders are looking to quantify the impact of community programs. How have you evaluated the effectiveness of programs in the past?

Probes

- How have you measured the impact of programs that you have been involved with in the past?
- What are some ways that you think would be valid to measure the impact of our programs?
- How could you "sell" the positive impact of mentorship?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates an understanding of how to assess the impact of programs
- Demonstrates passion about how they have successfully promoted other programs
- Demonstrates the ability to clearly articulate 'why' people should support BBBS by differentiating its 'brand' in the children and youth movement, and quantifying the benefits it provides to the community (changing the 'soft' perception of BBBS)

COMPETENCY

Relationship and Public Relations

How have you partnered with others outside your organization to advance a common cause?

Probes

- What do you think is key to a successful long-term partnership?
- What is the partnership you are most proud of, and that you believe made the biggest difference to the community?
- Who are the partners (or types of partners) that you think are relevant to explore as an ED of BBBS?

Desired Responses

- Actively networks; continuously renews and builds relationships that create opportunities for their organization (funding, program, volunteer)
- Demonstrates understanding of how to work in and sustain partnerships (communication, win/win,etc)
- Demonstrates honesty, integrity, accountability and appropriate transparency in their relationships

What do you think are the key selling features of the BBBS brand that you would emphasize to gain support?

Probes

- What do you think differentiates BBBS from other child/youth agencies and organizations?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates the ability to clearly articulate ‘why’ people should support BBBS by differentiating its ‘brand’ in the children and youth movement, and quantifying the benefits it provides to the community (changing the ‘soft’ perception of BBBS)

How would you communicate differently to the following groups about an allegation of child abuse?

- parents
- volunteers
- board
- media

Relationship and Public Relations

COMPETENCY

Relationship and Public Relations

Probes

- What are the different communication needs of these groups?
- What are some potential messages to maintain confidence in BBBS?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates a sensitivity to the communication needs of others; is able to relate and establish a 'connection' with different types of people and groups (kids, parents, volunteers, staff, board members, media)
- Demonstrates political astuteness in crafting and delivering the appropriate message to each audience
- Demonstrates honesty, integrity, accountability and appropriate transparency in all relationships
- Builds trust through a direct approach in delivering both 'good' and 'difficult' messages

Can you describe a 'difficult' relationship or partnership (e.g., funder, internal/external partner) that you were able to turn into a rewarding one?

Probes

- What was challenging about the partnership?
- What did you do to change the relationship for the better?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates optimism, focus and tenacity especially in challenging situations; focuses on finding solutions (rather than finding excuses not to succeed)
- Demonstrates a sensitivity to the communication needs of others; is able to relate and establish a 'connection' with different types of people and groups (kids, parents, volunteers, staff, board members, media)
- Demonstrates honesty, integrity, accountability and appropriate transparency in all relationships
- Builds trust through a direct approach in delivering both 'good' and 'difficult' messages

COMPETENCY

Leadership

What qualities do you think makes an ED an effective leader?

Probes

- What are your leadership strengths?
- What leadership skills would you like to improve, and how would you do this?
- What have you learned from your own leaders about effective leadership?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates a clear understanding of the behaviours for leadership success
- Demonstrates a strong sense of their strengths and development needs

Can you describe a time when you had to deal with an underperforming or difficult person (e.g., employee, peer, volunteer)?

Probes

- What was the situation, and the impact of this person's behaviour?
- What was your role in dealing with this person, and what did you do to address the situation?
- What is your general philosophy or approach in mentoring/coaching others to achieve the high standards that are important to the BBBS brand?

Desired Responses

- Provides strong mentorship to agency employees; is able to clearly establish performance goals, monitor progress, and coach employees to a high standard by providing the performance feedback and recognition that is important to their success, engagement and retention
- Demonstrates the ability to assess others' (employees, board members, volunteers) strengths and interests, and leverages their unique talents for maximum benefit – is also able to determine skill 'gaps' that threaten agency deliverables and actively engage people who can fill them

What are your thoughts about how you would ensure a successful relationship between yourself and the Board?

Leadership

COMPETENCY

Leadership

Probes

- What experience have you had in dealing with Boards?
- What are your expectations of a board?
- What are the key delineators between board and ED accountabilities?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates a good understanding of the role of the Board vs the role of the ED

Have you ever had to implement a change that others did not understand or support?

Probes

- What was the change, and why was there resistance to it?
- How did you work with others to get them on side?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates a clear understanding of the organization vision and mission, and is able to confidently focus others (staff, board, volunteers) on its priorities
- Is able to motivate and focus others through both good and challenging times; takes the time to recognize and celebrate successes
- Demonstrates strong listening skills; is able to create an inclusive environment by actively soliciting and valuing others' opinions

It is increasingly a challenge to engage and retain good people (e.g., employees, volunteers). What do you believe is key to employee/volunteer engagement and retention?

Probes

- As a manager, what have been the engagement, or retention challenges you have been faced with, and how did you address them?
- What are the key challenges facing not-for-profits to attract, engage, and retain employees and volunteers today?
- What are some of the ways you think not-for-profits could more successfully attract and retain volunteers and employees?
- What are your strengths in engaging others?

Leadership

COMPETENCY

Leadership

Desired Responses

- Provides strong mentorship to employees; is able to clearly establish performance goals, monitor progress, and coach employees to a high standard by providing the performance feedback and recognition that is important to their success, engagement and retention
- Anticipates barriers to on-going engagement and retention of employees and volunteers (e.g., GenX values, competitive compensation), and creatively finds ways to enhance the value proposition to maintain a win-win partnership

What are the steps that you would take to deal with an employee that was frequently late and/or absent?

Probes

- Have you had to deal with this before? If so, what was the outcome?
- What conversations would you have?
- What are the proper steps to deal with termination, if necessary?
- What other difficult HR issues have you had to deal with?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates a thorough understanding of all aspects of Human Resources.

Leadership

COMPETENCY

Operational Excellence

What are the indicators that you would look for to assess the ‘health’ of an agency?

Probes

- How would you assess the financial health of the agency?
- How would you assess the agency’s strengths from a Human Resources perspective?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates an understanding of how to develop and interpret budgets (e.g., where funds are coming from); is able to ensure a good mix (and reserve of) funds to minimize negative impact of unforeseen circumstances
- Demonstrates resourcefulness and fiscal responsibility in deploying agency funds
- Demonstrates a thorough understanding of all aspects of Human Resources

What is your level of knowledge with respect to the legislation that governs the operation of this type of agency?

Probes

- How have you had to apply this knowledge in the past?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates a sound knowledge of the policies, legislation and practices that govern the operation of the agency, (e.g. Financial), and is able to communicate and apply them appropriately to minimize risk to the agency
- Demonstrates familiarity with charitable status rules and CRA, e.g. 3-3010 filing

What is a significant change or improvement that you have made to improve the management of an area, or agency (or organization)?

Probes

- How did you determine this was a priority?
- What was your role in the change? What steps did you take?
- What difference did the change make?

Operational Excellence

COMPETENCY

Operational Excellence

- How did you measure its success?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates a clear sense of priorities
- Takes initiative

What 'checks' are important to ensure programs are on the right track and meeting their objectives?

Probes

- What are the potential 'threats' to programs that deal with children and youth?
- Have you had to intervene to get programs back on track in the past? How did you do this?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates an understanding of sound case management practices; is familiar with basic documentation principles

COMPETENCY

Strategic Thinking

How have you developed and implemented a successful strategy in the past?

Probes

- What was the objective of the strategy? Why was it important to develop this strategy?
- What was the vision?
- What was your role in developing the strategy?
- What was your role in implementing the strategy (and ensuring it didn't sit on the shelf)?
- What were the challenges to its successful implementation, and how did you overcome these?
- Were there other partners involved to help you realize the vision? How did you work together?

Desired Responses

- Demonstrates a strong understanding of current and emerging community needs, and the on-going sustainability of current programs to meet these needs
- Is able to critically analyze the past impact and sustainability of current programs in context of the changing external environment (e.g., demographics, economic, funding) and leverage the potential of every program
- Demonstrates a strong vision to expand the current reach of programs
- Demonstrates creative 'out-of-the-box' thinking in developing new programs and channels to mentor more children and youth; is able to step outside their comfort zone by taking educated risks to re-fresh the BBBS brand
- Actively seeks external partners to create new opportunities (e.g. new funding streams) that are aligned with the BBBS strategy to advance the children and youth agenda
- Demonstrates good strategic and analytical thinking in deciding where to focus fundraising efforts based on potential outcomes; recognizes the need to make trade-offs in activities, (e.g. speaking, meetings, grant writing) to achieve fundraising goals

Notes and Rating Sheet

COMPETENCY	NOTES	ASSESSMENT				
		Weak		Avg	Excellent	
Optimistic Drive		<input type="checkbox"/>				
Relationship/ Public Relations		<input type="checkbox"/>				
Leadership		<input type="checkbox"/>				
Operational Excellence		<input type="checkbox"/>				
Strategic Thinking		<input type="checkbox"/>				

Competence Profile

ASSESSMENT		
Weak	Average	Exceptional
Demonstrates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Few desired behaviours ▪ Lack of clarity or confidence in response ▪ Responses that are not evident of having demonstrated this competency at the desired level in the past, or will be able to easily demonstrate it in the ED role 	Demonstrates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many desired behaviours ▪ Articulate and clear response ▪ Solid knowledge and skills in competency area relevant to role of ED 	Demonstrates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All (or most) desired competency behaviours ▪ Exceptionally clear, compelling and confident response to questions ▪ Provides strong evidence they have demonstrated this competency in the past, and will demonstrate it at a high level as an ED

Appendix
Executive Director Competency Profile

Competence Profile

Competencies of the Executive Director

Optimistic Drive

- Demonstrates optimism, focus and tenacity especially in challenging situations; focuses on finding solutions (rather than finding excuses not to succeed)
- Learns from, and is not discouraged, by “failures”; does not dwell on past mistakes
- Enjoys a fast paced environment with multiple priorities and stakeholders; exercises sound judgment to determine the “right” priorities (recognizing that trade-offs are always needed to achieve the best outcomes, and avoid burn-out)
- Is proactive in seeking help to resolve problems and challenges, e.g., develops a network of informal, trusted advisors both inside and outside the agency for advice and support
- Demonstrates a sense of humour, the ability to laugh at themselves, and put things into perspective
- Demonstrates a healthy “work/life” balance; is committed to personal wellness and managing stress (e.g. takes vacation, makes time for family, friends, and personal interests)

Relationship and Public Relations

- Acts in a manner that is consistent with being a leader in a children’s charity at work, in the community, and in private-life; recognizes they are the face of BBBS and the responsibility in upholding its reputation
- Demonstrates passion about the mentoring movement; easily engages people through their positive energy and visibility in the broader community
- Demonstrates confidence, clarity and conviction in public speaking
- Actively networks; continuously renews and builds relationships that create opportunities (funding, program, volunteer) for BBBS and the mentoring movement
- Demonstrates the ability to clearly articulate ‘why’ people should support BBBS by differentiating its ‘brand’ in the children and youth movement, and quantifying the benefits it provides to the community (changing the ‘soft’ perception of BBBS)
- Demonstrates a sensitivity to the communication needs of others; is able to relate and establish a ‘connection’ with different types of people and groups (kids, parents, volunteers, staff, board members, and media)
- Demonstrates political astuteness in crafting and delivering the appropriate message to each audience
- Demonstrates honesty, integrity, accountability and appropriate transparency in all relationships
- Builds trust through a direct approach in delivering both ‘good’ and ‘difficult’

Relationship and Public Relations

messages

Leadership

- Demonstrates a clear understanding of the BBBS vision and mission, and is able to confidently focus others (staff, board, volunteers) on the priorities of the agency
- Is able to clearly discern and articulate the relevant agency issues to the board, and provide the required background and education to support their decision-making; similarly, is able to communicate the impact of board activity and decisions to agency employees to facilitate internal alignment
- Provides strong mentorship to agency employees; is able to clearly establish performance goals, monitor progress, and coach employees to a high standard by providing the performance feedback and recognition that is important to their success, engagement and retention
- Anticipates barriers to on-going engagement and retention of employees and volunteers (e.g., GenX values, competitive compensation), and creatively finds ways to enhance the value proposition to maintain a win-win partnership
- Demonstrates the ability to assess others' (employees, board members, volunteers) strengths and interests, and leverage their unique talents; is able to determine skill 'gaps' (e.g., fundraising skills) that threaten agency deliverables and actively engage people with the desired competencies
- Demonstrates strong listening skills; is able to create an inclusive environment by actively soliciting and valuing others' opinions
- Is able to motivate and focus others through both good and challenging times; takes the time to recognize and celebrate successes
- Is able to tailor their leadership style depending on the audience or situation; is able to respond quickly and decisively in crisis situations

Operational Excellence

- Establishes, monitors and enforces high quality standards to maintain a highly professional agency (e.g., proposals and letters are professionally written)
- Demonstrates the ability to translate strategy into implementation plans (e.g. fundraising strategy); demonstrates strong project management skills
- Demonstrates a sound knowledge of the policies, legislation and practices that govern the operation of the agency, (e.g. Financial), and is able to communicate and apply them to minimize risk to the agency
- Demonstrates a thorough understanding of all aspects of Human Resources

Operational Excellence

(Employment legislation, performance management, compensation, termination, etc.); is able to make tough decisions (e.g., vacation preferences, raises, termination) based on a sound rationale, and consistent philosophy

- Demonstrates an understanding of how to develop and interpret budgets (e.g., where funds are coming from); is able to ensure a good mix (and reserve of) funds to minimize negative impact of unforeseen circumstances
- Demonstrates resourcefulness and fiscal responsibility in deploying agency funds
- Demonstrates the ability to keep well-organized files related the ‘running’ of the agency , e.g. documentation, policies, procedures, systems, to facilitate the transfer of knowledge (knowledge management)
- Demonstrates an understanding of sound case management practices; is familiar with basic documentation principles

Strategic Thinking

- Demonstrates a strong vision of the possibilities to expand the current reach of BBBS
- Demonstrates a strong understanding of current and emerging community needs, and the on-going sustainability of current programs to meet these needs
- Is able to critically analyze the past impact and sustainability of current programs in context of the changing external environment (e.g., demographics, economic, funding) and leverage the potential of every program
- Demonstrates creative ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking in developing new programs and channels to mentor more children and youth; is able to step outside their comfort zone by taking educated risks to re-fresh the BBBS brand
- Actively seeks external partners to create new opportunities (e.g. new funding streams) that are aligned with the BBBS strategy to advance the children and youth agenda
- Recognizes the value of engaging with BBBS of Canada, and demonstrates a willingness to collaborate with BBBS agencies both regionally and nationally
- Demonstrates good strategic and analytical thinking in deciding where to focus fundraising efforts based on potential outcomes; recognizes the need to make trade-offs in activities, (e.g. speaking, meetings, grant writing) to achieve fundraising goals
- Develops a customized strategy on how to ‘pitch’ to different fundraisers; is able to clearly articulate (both in writing and speaking) a compelling reason to support BBBS, and provide ‘evidence’ of outcomes
- Demonstrates flexibility in revising strategic plans and goals to minimize the impact of negative trends, or capitalize on emerging opportunities (or because the strategic

Strategic Thinking

plan was flawed in the first place)