



Case Study: New Hampshire Humane Society, Laconia, NH

The situation

In the space of just a few years, New Hampshire Humane Society had experienced significant leadership transition. At the time, this well-established animal welfare nonprofit had been serving the communities of the Lakes Region of New Hampshire for 120 years. Given the cumulative effect of those transitions, by 2018 the board recognized that the organization needed time and support before moving forward with a permanent replacement.

The board engaged outside counsel to assess the organization's needs and determine the right path forward. That assessment made clear that stabilizing the team, clarifying roles, and establishing a more consistent internal culture would be essential foundations for any incoming permanent leader.

The board ultimately concluded that an interim executive director would be the right bridge by providing someone who could steady the organization and give a new permanent executive a clean foundation to build from.

That's where Interim Executive Solutions came in. IES offered two vetted professional interim leaders to consider, and the board committee chose Stephen Schaffer, who they assessed had the appropriate management experience to address the situation.

The goal? Steady the ship and prepare for a new permanent Executive Director. During the interim appointment, Interim Executive Solutions professionals assess and address organizational needs so the selected Executive Director is more informed and able to forge a healthy work environment, gain greater efficiency, and course correct where needed.

How IES handled it

Schaffer had led several large nonprofits before, all with volunteer boards which included their share of strong personalities.

On his first day in October 2018, the board chair called a staff meeting, introducing Schaffer to all the employees. The chair was prepared to run the meeting, but Schaffer stepped into the leadership role from the start. As he recalled, "the board had some good, thoughtful and engaged people on it."

Of the employees, he said, "I was warmly welcomed by some, skeptically viewed by others." It's not unusual for organizational change to generate fear and mistrust.

Schaffer established a management team, including employees with previously undervalued skills. He ensured the staff veterinarian team would remain. The organization's existing corps of 30 to 40 volunteers were excellent, he said.

Over his first five to six months on the job, Schaffer "really gained the trust and respect of all the board members," said Timothy James Everett, vice-chair of the board at the time. "The staff was so happy to have a steady hand. If we could have hired Steve, we probably would have."



As the board began the nationwide search for the organization's permanent ED, Schaffer served as a liaison between the board and the search firm. This was a key role as applications came in for the position. Finalists passed through several conversations with the recruiter, Schaffer, and a board member before coming to New Hampshire to meet the board in person.

In the end, "they hired the right executive director," said Schaffer. "He had the background, the social skills, he really understood the role."

New ED, clearer path forward

When Charles Stanton arrived, the organization was stable and was ready to evolve and move forward, in large part because of the environment Schaffer had worked to establish.

Upon accepting the position, Stanton said it was clear Steve "had done an exceptional job of steadying the ship following significant transitions at every level."

"What impressed me most was how skillfully he managed the expectations of board members, staff, community members, donors, and partners, many of whom were understandably anxious and not always reasonable in what they asked of him."

What followed was a period of significant evolution. The pandemic accelerated changes that were already underway, requiring board development, staff transitions, and programmatic pivots across multiple years.

"Steve was clearly mindful of the role of an interim executive," Stanton said. "He preserved the organization's ability to move and gave the incoming leader a clean mandate. That is exactly what you want from an interim placement."

The result is an organization with a substantially expanded service model, a growing municipal footprint, and a national and international presence. This includes an expansion to a sister organization, the Animal Rights Foundation, which is dedicated to strengthening the animal welfare sector nationally and internationally. Stanton concluded, "The turnaround and trajectory have been remarkable, and Interim Executive Solutions was an integral part of that success."