



WOMEN OF COLOR

in Fundraising and Philanthropy

# Top 10 Search Firms for Women of Color

OCTOBER 2021



## Top 10 Search Firms for Women of Color

Women of Color in Fundraising and Philanthropy (WOC) surveyed its members and executive search firms that specialize in or have a strong practice in placements within the nonprofit or social sector. We sought to identify 10 firms that are especially noteworthy for their approach to and results when working with women of color. WOC engaged Melissa Brown & Associates, LLC for the independent compilation of the ranked list of Top 10 Executive Search Firms for Women of Color.

Search firms and WOC members were asked similar questions to provide a perspective from both sides of an engagement. WOC members were also asked to provide their feedback about firms they engaged as representatives of nonprofit or social sector organizations working to fill a position.

Data collected from search firms assessed ownership and recruiters (number of women, women of color, etc.); searches completed, and placements made (again, for number or percentage of women of color); specific steps taken (or not) to reach women of color; how positions are framed (gender neutral, including salary ranges, and so on); and follow-up after placement. WOC members reported whether recruiters focused on individual qualifications; if the firm helped them in a successful placement; and about follow-up after the engagement.

These firms are the Top 10 Search Firms for Women of Color in 2021, presented here in ranked order based on scoring. The Top 10 include very large, national firms, and very focused firms that work regionally or specifically with people of color.



1

**Pearl Street Collective** has offices in Boston and San Diego. The firm works with national clients in the social justice and higher education domains with operating budgets that range from under \$1m to over \$1 billion.



2



**Diversified Search Group** and its partner, **Koya**, most often serves clients with budgets of \$10 million or more with missions in the arts, K-12 and other education, environment, higher education, or philanthropy/fundraising. Diversified Search Group. has headquarters in Philadelphia and offices in 10 other cities.



3



**Campbell & Company** is based in Chicago and has offices nationally. Clients are all nonprofit organizations and search clients typically have total operating budgets of \$3 million or more. This firm has conducted searches for organizations in the arts, environment, higher education, and human services (including youth development).



4



**Isaacson Miller** recruits for mission-driven organizations nationally, with offices in five major cities including New York and Los Angeles. A typical client has an operating budget of \$10 million or more. The firm most often works with organizations in the arts, K-12 education, health care, higher education, ad philanthropy/fundraising.



5



**Envision Consulting** has offices in New York City and Los Angeles, with clients predominantly in those areas. A typical client has an operating budget of \$10 million or more and works in the arts, K-12 and other education, environment, or human services (including youth development).

● Firms with high WOC member ratings.

● The search company reports 25 percent or more of its recruiters are women of color.



6

**Thinking Ahead Executive Search** is based in Nashville, TN. They conduct executive searches in multiple industries, including the nonprofit sector, and have national connections. Nonprofit organization clients include those with operating budgets of \$10 million or more and typically work in the arts, environment, human services (including youth development), or religion.



7

**Sensa Recruiting** is a boutique firm based in northern New Jersey and the greater New York City area. The firm specializes in searches for nonprofit organizations with total operating budgets of \$1 million and up and works with human services agencies (including youth development), K-12 and other education, and philanthropy/fundraising entities.



8

**Lindauer Global** is an international firm that specializes in fundraising and advancement searches. Clients typically have total operating budgets of \$10 million or more. The firm most often works with organizations in the arts, K-12 education, health care, higher education, and philanthropy/fundraising.



9

**Aspen Leadership Group** focuses its work in the nonprofit sector. Some clients have operating budgets as low as \$1 million or less. This firm conducts searches largely for organizations in the arts, environment, health care, higher education, or human services.



10

**Howe-Lewis International** is based in New York City and has clients across the U.S. and in other countries. A typical client has an operating budget of \$10 million or more and works in the arts, environment, health care, higher education, human services (including youth development), or philanthropy/fundraising.

- Firms with high WOC member ratings.
- The search company reports 25 percent or more of its recruiters are women of color.



## The Top Firms Recommended By Members

Members of Women of Color in Fundraising and Philanthropy scored several firms very highly, whether or not the firm participated in the research survey. This list shows six firms because of a tie.



1

**Glymph Consulting** is a general nonprofit consulting firm based in Southern California and offers search assistance among other services. Clients include social justice and civic engagement nonprofits, community colleges, progressive political campaigns, and law firms.



2

**Isaacson Miller** works exclusively with mission-driven organizations and has offices in five major cities. The firm is dedicated to recruiting women and people of color to leadership roles at mission-driven organizations. Clients include major universities and education-focused institutions and nonprofits.

● Firm is also recognized in the Top 10.



3

**Offor** audits an organization's culture and makes recommendations to promote a more inclusive culture. Services include a "talent network" for women and people of color and executive search for leadership positions. Clients include education and social justice organizations in the public and private sector, with national services



4

**On-Ramps** is based in New York City and specializes in finding talent for mission-driven organizations in the social sector, with national clients in a variety of sectors, including education, health, youth development, social services, human rights, sustainability, the environment, justice, and more.



5

**DRG Talent Advisory Group** is focused on nonprofit organization searches. Their main offices are in New York City. Clients include K-12 and university education, civil rights, health, human services, and the arts, the majority of whom have operating budgets over \$10 million.



6

**Envision Consulting** works largely in California and the New York City area. A typical client has an operating budget of \$10 million or more and works in the arts, K-12 and other education, environment, or human services (including youth development).

● Firm is also recognized in the Top 10.



# Attributes of the Top 10 and How They Work with Women of Color

Across the firms that applied to be one of the Top 10, women of color accounted for 30 percent of their placements since 2019. In this result, there was no difference between those in the Top 10 and other applicants. In some other areas under consideration, the Top 10 differed in discernable ways in their approach.

## Assuring Access to Open Opportunities

On the application, up to 10 points could be given for methods to reach women of color with news of an open position, eight yes/no responses and up to two points for additional methods described in an open-ended question. This was the single highest-scoring element of the 22 scores used. On average, the Top 10 firms received 7.6 points, which is distinctly different from other firms. The table below shows that Top 10 applicants were much more likely than others to advertise in publications or sites more likely to reach women of color.

### Comparison of Methods Used to Assure Access by Top 10 Firms and Other Applicants

Method	Top 10	Others
Advertise in areas likely to reach women of color in order to attract individuals who fit criteria for skills, demographics, or attributes the employer seeks	91%	42%
Use gender neutral language in job posting	91%	39%
Do not ask applicants for salary history*	91%	32%
Consider applicants' experience in addition to formal education	91%	45%
Network with people you know already	91%	35%
Look on LinkedIn	91%	42%
Score applications using a rubric to determine which candidates to move forward	73%	23%
Include salary ranges in recruitment information*	45%	29%

\*Note that state laws vary about how salary information is collected and shared.



## Working toward Salary Equity

Most firms applying for Top 10 recognition said they seek salary equity. Different applicants used different methods, including careful work with the hiring organization to be sure the salary offered is fair and competitive. Firms also use proprietary data sets, maintain records based on salaries from clients, use public information about compensation such as from the Association of Fundraising Professionals or a local entity. There was little difference in the number of methods used for salary equity among the Top 10 Firms and other applicants. These comments from applications received show some of the frequent approaches.

- It's about ensuring that the role is scoped correctly and then compensated appropriately. Second, we typically recommend to our client partners that they publicly post the compensation band on the job description.
- We benchmark with market data and proprietary info to ensure all candidates are provided comparable and competitive salaries. We also counsel search committees and at times candidates re: compensation to ensure equity is achieved
- When clients do not understand the importance of compensation transparency, we work to help them be more open. We also work with candidates to prepare them for compensation negotiations.





## Tracking Client Satisfaction

Across all applicants, a high majority provide support after the placement, and the average continuation of support is nearly two years. Firms recognized in the Top 10 were more likely to use a formal process to assess client satisfaction, such as surveys and on-going scheduled 'check-in' calls. Here are some examples from Top 10 Search Firms about how they track client satisfaction and satisfaction among people who are hired.

- Follow-up contact with placements at prescribed intervals in year 1.
- Engage with placement and candidate to support retention and success.
- We have a stewardship manager who helps us keep in contact with candidates, prior candidates, hiring managers, and industry partners.
- We post a post-search survey for all candidates, not only the placements.
- We directly assist with onboarding and monitor how things are going throughout the first year of employment and beyond. Recruitment team members check in approximately every three months with placed candidates, as well as with the direct supervisors in order to aid and ensure cultural inclusion, as well as functional success.

Other applicants—those not in the Top 10—were likely to report that while they monitor retention or use anecdotes, they do not have a formal process for assessing client satisfaction.



# Use of Search Firms by Women Of Color

Among the participants in the survey of WOC members, 85 percent reported using a search firm or having been contacted by a firm that was seeking qualified applicants for an open position. Of those invited to apply for an open position, nearly all did submit their credentials (96 percent). Some WOC members had experiences with more than one search firm.

Among job applicants 58 percent strongly agreed they were treated with respect by the search firm. Among those representing hiring organizations, just 25 percent strongly agreed that they were treated with respect.

## Comparison of Scoring on Member Survey Based on Whether WOC Member was an Applicant or Representing the Hiring Organization

Recruiter	Applicant	Hiring Organization
<b>Treated me with respect</b>		
Strongly agree	58%	25%
Agree	30%	50%
<b>Considered experience in addition to education</b>		
Strongly agree	64%	25%
Agree	21%	63%
<b>Listened to applicant's goals</b>		
Strongly agree	67%	29%
Agree	22%	57%
<b>Looked for match, not to fill a quota for DEI goal</b>		
Strongly agree	65%	43%
Agree	25%	57%



## What WOC Members Said

Applicants recommended 26 firms mentioned by WOC members. These are some representative comments:

- I always feel like this search firm treats me like a real human being — some recruiters can make you feel a bit like a pawn in a game, but I've never felt that way with this firm.
- They found me on LinkedIn and reached out to me about an executive leadership opportunity as CEO of a philanthropic organization.

WOC members who worked with a search firm as a client were less likely to recommend a firm than were members who worked with a firm as an applicant. These are examples of concerns expressed:

- Seems like the firm does not make a concerted effort to seek people of color for open positions.
- For some reason they couldn't find not one candidate of color. This is a firm that says it is all about diversity and finding diverse candidates.



# Recommendations

The project asked recruiters and members of Women of Color for their suggestions to help people find their dream jobs. Ideas fit within several general themes. These are:

- Know Your Value and Values
- Hold Employers Accountable
- Build a Network of Support including Coach/Mentor
- Work with a Reputable Recruiter

Each bullet point under the headings below is a quotation.

## Know Your Value and Values

- Recognize that sometimes you have to leave a role in order to grow. Always be aware of what opportunities are out there and ask for what you need from your organization.
- Plan to do research 6-12 months prior to when you want to shift jobs and keep your resume and LinkedIn profile updated.
- This is a job seeker's market. Be intentional. Ask yourself: what do I want to be doing next? Then research the type of organization where you want to work, by mission/focus area, budget/revenue size, geographic scope. Look for connections to schedule an informational call. Be specific in your ask. And come up with 2-3 questions that you'd want to ask of this person.
- Candidates can do a comprehensive strength/skills evaluation. Skills attained should be showcased. Demonstrate accomplishments to support competing for career advancement opportunities. Assure that supervisor(s) are aware of strengths and skills.

- Pursue opportunities like fellowships whenever possible. Know that position descriptions are wish lists, so apply for roles even if you don't meet every single qualification. Know that the perspective you bring is an asset, so don't be afraid to negotiate on salary.
- Seek out roles that resonate with your personal passion in organizations that have an organizational culture which aligns with your values.
- Ask lots of questions before accepting a job, learn about how the organization's DEI work is infused in fundraising/donor-facing work, work with a recruiter who cares about you and your best interests. Be awesome!
- Make sure you know your worth, compensation-wise, skill set and experience wise, and don't hesitate to let them know that you know your worth. WOC in fundraising is a high commodity! Work it!
- Gain experience supervising, managing a budget, and executing a strategic plan. Help the next woman of color along. Document your achievements and role clarity. Know that you'll never get the benefit of the doubt. Take up space and don't be scared to share your opinion.

## Hold Employers Accountable

- Assess the right opportunities and organizations for you. Assess the culture and the state of DEI at the organization. What is an organization's DEI plan, how many women of color are in leadership roles, and what the retention rates are of women of color? If seeking an Executive Director role, look at the makeup of the board and what that board's commitment is to supporting women of color (including but not limited to board DEI training, etc.). Engage with organizations that have a plan and record of successful women of color placements and leadership.
- Use GuideStar and check the 990. Check on their registration with the Department of State, Bureau of Charitable Organizations, in the state. These are important first steps. 'Audit' their website to see if you align with the organization's vision. Look at their programming, events, board of directors, etc. Do you see yourself as part of this team? Google them as well - you'd be surprised at what comes up in the news. Find out when they last conducted a strategic planning session. Are WOC in leadership roles?
- Ask specific, probing questions and request specific documentation and explanations that support your diligence on a

role and an honest accounting of what the challenges will be for a given role, especially at the CEO level - financials, board minutes, insight into how issues are surfaced and have been dealt with in the past, what success looks like for this hire and how it will be measured.

- Ask the organization to invest in professional development - coaching is essential at the executive level, and you should be able to choose a coach that you connect with.
- Think about the existing team and how it grew to support the former leader, and how it needs to adjust to be complementary of your skills.
- Research market compensation to be prepared for negotiation stages. Research media coverage of organization to identify possible issues or patterns of behavior. Seek peer information re: organizations, not just official or marketing information.

## Build a Network of Support

- Intentionally build, nurture and activate a strong network of fundraisers and nonprofit leaders who will support you, champion your abilities and help amplify your brand. Lift up other women of color for opportunities whenever possible.
- Seek mentors who will help you avoid career pitfalls and serve as your guide and sounding board throughout your professional journey.
- Networking is critical, as is an up-to-date LinkedIn profile. I have received referrals for positions because I have committed to networking: whether that is running for board-level positions in industry associations, or attending conferences, or presenting at those conferences.
- Build alliances and advocates. Be selective. Only go where you're wanted and valued. Don't let racist, sexist "leaders" get you down or gaslight you. Know that you're worthy.
- Join WOC, AADO and other organizations.
- Join non-POC professional networks to gain broad understanding of and access to industry, organizations, leaders of all races and ethnicity.



## Work with a Reputable Search Firm or Recruiter

- Identify the sector you'd like to work in (academia, health, other) and partner with a recruiter who has strong experience in that sector. A good recruiter can also be a helpful partner in helping you evaluate offers.
- Work with a reputable firm with proven expertise when option available; connect with search colleagues if not handling the role to see if they have advice or counsel.
- Check to see if the search firm has people of color on staff, in leadership, as owners.
- If a firm has a network or newsletter, sign up for it. Some create their initial lists from within their own network.
- Work with a firm that has your best interest in mind. If you've had success with a firm, use them again.
- Make sure the recruiter understands the challenges WOC face and ensure that the organization is not just performative in their DEI work and allyship.
- Be careful of inauthentic recruitment firms and companies that are looking to fill DEI recruitment quotas, but with no desire to hire a woman of color.
- Build relationships with key recruiters at search firms; ask the hard questions upfront and do not be shy by stating your expectations.