You've made it through the initial conversations with the search consultant—and now, the real evaluation begins. You've been invited to a screening interview, often conducted by the search committee. These used to be affectionately called "airport interviews," often held in hotel conference rooms. Today, they're more likely to take place over Zoom or Teams.

Face-to-Face vs. Virtual

Personally I prefer face-to-face interviews. Yes, they require travel, but they offer a better sense of the room, and more importantly, allow the committee to experience your presence beyond a screen. Communication isn't just about words—it's also about nonverbal cues. In virtual settings, those signals are harder to read and harder to send effectively. That's why clarity, tone, and presence matter even more online.

Do Your Homework: Financial Health Matters

Before you go into the interview, take time to understand the financial health of the organization. A great resource? Their IRS Form 990. If financial statements aren't your strength, ask a colleague or advisor with financial expertise to give you a brief analysis. It can provide critical insight into stability and future challenges—information that's helpful both for your interview and your decision-making.

Key Principles to Guide You

Regardless of whether the interview is in-person or virtual, a few things hold true:

- **Cultural Fit Matters:** The committee is looking for someone they can work with—a team player with emotional intelligence, not just the smartest person in the room.
- **Be Authentic:** This is not the time to "fake it until you make it." Be yourself. Let your real perspective and values come through.
- **Use Inclusive Language:** Speak as if you're already part of the team. Use "we" and "us" rather than "you."
- **Ask Thoughtful Questions:** Show genuine interest in the organization's goals. Avoid questions that sound suspicious or negative. One of the best questions you can ask: *"What would you hope the person in this role will bring to the organization?"*

Dress the Part

Even if the committee is casual, you should not be. A business suit is always appropriate—it conveys respect and professionalism, no matter the setting.

Prepare for the "How Will You Start?" Question

One of the most common (and important) questions is how you plan to begin your role. Don't talk about changing the organization out of the gate. Instead, speak to your approach to listening, learning, and understanding the culture. If you do have change ideas, frame them as inquiries, not assumptions. Try something like, *"Would there be openness to exploring…?"*

Leave on a Gracious Note

Always thank the committee—verbally and in writing. They could become your future colleagues, and how you close the conversation will shape their final impression of you