

10 Essential Considerations for Appointing a **Corporate Affairs or Policy Search Partner**

We are the leading communications, policy and advocacy headhunter. A 100% employee owned, boutique search and talent advisory firm.

We help you to hire the most senior communications leaders and everyone who reports to them.

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Appointing a corporate affairs or policy leader is one of the most consequential decisions an organisation will make. These leaders determine how an organisation is seen by government, investors, regulators, the media and the wider public.

Having spent over two decades advising boards and placing senior leaders in these positions, we know that the right hire brings authority and credibility, while the wrong one can damage reputation, slow progress and undermine strategic goals.

At Ellwood Atfield we have delivered
over 2,000 searches in the past 20 years.



In the last two years alone, we have appointed dozens of Directors and senior leaders, with the **majority still in post after 24 months.**

70% of placements made in the last three years remain in role, and 86% of clients return for repeat work. From this experience, here are ten essential considerations when selecting a search partner.

1 Track record, completion rate and retention

When assessing a search partner, ask not only about the roles they have filled but whether those individuals are still in post and delivering value. Completion rates, examples of comparable searches, and evidence of long-term retention are critical markers of quality. In our experience, sustainable appointments come from a partner who knows the market deeply and can anticipate how well a candidate will integrate with both the role and the board.

2 Transparency of the process

Senior appointments should never be misrepresented at the outset. Clients must be assured that the commitment made during the briefing is delivered consistently throughout the process. We have seen too many instances where a senior consultant wins the brief but junior researchers deliver the work. Clients deserve clarity on who will lead the assignment, how decisions are made, and how the collective insights of the wider firm will be applied. You should feel confident that the individuals you meet at pitch stage are the same ones who will guide you through the search.

3 Diversity, equity and inclusion

Corporate affairs leaders represent the communities and stakeholders they serve, yet representation in the profession is still unbalanced, particularly at senior levels. A strong search partner should be able to explain their approach to market mapping, the steps they take to engage talent beyond LinkedIn, and the way they measure and report on diversity throughout the process. Without this rigour, you risk limiting your field of vision and perpetuating the same narrow networks.

4 Sector knowledge and geographical reach

The skillset and experience required to appoint a corporate affairs leader for a highly regulated business will vary significantly from the director of communications of an NGO or membership body. Context is really important. The issues, stakeholders and pressures differ, and a search partner must show experience and real insights in these contexts. Equally, if you are appointing for an international role, you need evidence of global reach and cultural fluency. The right partner will have proven experience in the relevant sector and geography, reducing risk and accelerating impact.

5 Reputation and testimonials

Reputation is what we term the currency of this industry, just as you would not hire a communications director without references, you should not engage a search partner without evidence of their credibility. Ask for testimonials from both clients and candidates and look for repeat business. At Ellwood Atfield, our reputation has been built on trust, discretion and results over more than twenty years - that depth of relationship is what sustains long-term partnerships. Your search partner is acting as an extension of your brand, and the care they take in managing your stakeholders is critically important to ensure success beyond the appointment itself.

6 Strategic challenge, not just delivery

The best search partners will act as an extension of your leadership team. Before accepting the brief, they will interrogate it, challenge assumptions, and broaden the scope of possibilities. Often the most successful appointments come from candidates you might not have considered at the outset. A partner who is prepared to stretch your thinking and introduce left-of-field talent will add far greater value than one who delivers a narrow shortlist.

7 Shared values and passion

When appointing a senior leader, technical expertise is not enough; cultural alignment and values are equally as important. A partner who does not share your principles will struggle to represent you authentically in the market. At Ellwood Atfield, our employee-owned model means every consultant has a personal stake in each appointment, that sense of shared purpose ensures we approach every assignment with commitment and care.



8 Access to consultancy and leadership expertise

A search partner's role continues beyond the appointment, boards need advisers who provide support through leadership coaching, skills-gap analysis, succession planning and access to peer networks. This added layer of consultancy ensures the individuals we place are supported to succeed, and that organisations are equipped to meet future challenges. We have seen time and again how the ongoing investment in leaders determines whether they truly thrive.

9 Budget realism

A credible partner will give you an honest view of the market. Our team has advised many Boards where expectations and budget were out of step, and difficult conversations saved wasted time. You cannot secure a high quality, Board-ready Director on an unrealistic budget, and a firm that tells you otherwise is not acting in your best interests. A transparent discussion about cost, market conditions and candidate expectations is essential to a successful outcome. Similarly, a flexible fee-structure may enable you to achieve your hiring objectives through a condensed process.

10 Role clarity and objectives

Clarity at the outset sets the tone for success, a partner should help you refine how the role supports organisational strategy and what outcomes you expect in 12, 24 and 36 months. This is not about drafting a job description; it is about aligning the hire with your long-term objectives and ensuring that the individual appointed has the mandate, resources and authority to deliver.



Appointing a corporate affairs or policy leader is one of the most strategic decisions a board can make, the right partner will not only identify strong candidates but will act as a trusted adviser, helping you sharpen your brief, broaden your perspective, and secure a leader who can protect and enhance your reputation for years to come.

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At Ellwood Atfield, we place leaders who shape policy, protect reputations, and influence decisions at the highest level.

To discuss your next leadership appointment, contact our team directly



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