



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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# Recruitment and selection strategies in the third sector in Puerto Rico

## Estrategias de reclutamiento y selección en el tercer sector en Puerto Rico

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research was to identify the recruitment and selection strategies being adopted by nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in Puerto Rico and whether the COVID-19 pandemic brought any changes in these two processes. An online survey was administered to 24 NPOs as part of this research. According to the responses, all of them recruit and select using job descriptions, but only half use a classification or compensation plan. In addition, 33.3% of the organizations do not have an employee recruitment plan. The majority of the surveyed NPOs (95.8%) recruit through social media. Furthermore, 87.5% reported having faced challenges in recruiting over the past 12 months. Regarding selection, the most used method is the resume (87.5%). However, 83.3% of the organizations indicated they did not know whether the validity or reliability of their selection methods had been evaluated.

**Keywords:** *Nonprofit organizations, recruitment, personnel selection, personnel management, COVID-19.*

### Resumen

El propósito de esta investigación fue identificar las estrategias de reclutamiento y selección de personal utilizadas por las organizaciones sin fines de lucro (OSFL) en Puerto Rico y si la pandemia del COVID-19 produjo algún cambio en estos dos procesos. Para realizar esta investigación se administró una encuesta en línea que fue respondida por 24 OSFL. De acuerdo con las contestaciones de las OSFL, todas reclutan y seleccionan utilizando las descripciones de los puestos vacantes, pero solo la mitad recurre a un plan de clasificación o de retribución. También, un 33,3% de las organizaciones no tienen un plan de reclutamiento de empleados. La mayoría de las OSFL encuestadas (95,8%) reclutan a través de las redes sociales. Además, el 87,5% de las OSFL contestaron que en los últimos 12 meses han enfrentado desafíos para reclutar. En cuanto a la selección, el método más utilizado es el resumé (87,5%). Sin embargo, el 83,3% de las organizaciones informaron desconocer si se había evaluado la validez o confiabilidad de sus métodos de selección.

**Palabras clave:** *Empresa sin ánimo de lucro, contratación, selección de personal, gestión de personal, COVID-19.*

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## Introduction

In recent years, the third sector or nonprofit organizations (NPOs) have played an important role in Puerto Rico's economic and social development. By 2020, the nonprofit sector employed approximately 89,669 paid workers (Filantropía Puerto Rico, 2022). This represented 9.5% of all individuals employed in Puerto Rico that year (Departamento del Trabajo y Recursos Humanos, 2021). However, not all NPOs have paid staff. According to Filantropía Puerto Rico (2022), of the 425 organizations they surveyed, only 36.2% reported having employees. In fact, the average number of employees in these organizations was 18 (Filantropía Puerto Rico, 2022). In 2014, more than half of the surveyed NPOs reported having no employees, while around 75.0% had only five employees or fewer (Estudios Técnicos, 2015). This is due to the fact that many organizations depend on volunteers to carry out their functions. For the purposes of this research, NPOs are defined as nongovernmental entities that provide direct services to the population and are tax-exempt (Estudios Técnicos, 2015).

NPOs face internal and external challenges related to limited resources, financial pressures, increased competition, growing service demand, and difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified employees (McCandless, 2011). Therefore, given the importance of NPOs and the challenges they face, it is necessary to understand which strategies they use to recruit and select their salaried personnel. Consequently, the research questions were the following: (a) what types of recruitment and employee-selection strategies do NPOs use? and (b) what kinds of changes, if any, has the COVID-19 pandemic produced in the recruitment and selection strategies used in this sector? The justification for this study lies in the limited research on this topic in Puerto Rico; thus, it is unknown which recruitment and selection strategies are being adopted by NPOs. The possible impact of the pandemic on these two human-resource processes within such organizations is also unknown. To understand these strategies, it is necessary to consider how they relate to job analysis and other human-resource processes.

Human resource management consists of a series of processes and activities that facilitate the performance of work and promote effectiveness in organizational operations. These processes and activities relate to job analysis and planning, recruitment, selection, training, development, evaluation, compensation, and benefits. Each of these is based on the information obtained from job analysis. Job analysis consists of determining the importance of job tasks and the human attributes needed to perform those tasks (Conte & Landy, 2019). For this reason, these authors explain that a competently conducted job analysis allows for an understanding of positions and their behavioral requirements, thereby creating a solid basis for employment decisions. They also stress the importance of having a job analysis that identifies the necessary human attributes and enables recruitment efforts to focus on potential candidates (Conte & Landy, 2019).

Recruitment is the process through which organizations attract and search for prospective employees and influence them to apply for available positions (Cascio & Aguinis, 2019). Employee selection, in turn, is the process of choosing the individuals who are best qualified to perform a job (Snell et al., 2016). To accomplish this, it is essential to rely on job analysis, which is typically compiled in a job specification (Snell et al., 2016). Job specifications contain information about the competencies a person needs to perform a position. In addition, the selection process must use reliable and valid assessment methods (Conte & Landy, 2019).

There are different selection methods. The most commonly used include the evaluation of the information provided by candidates in their résumé or job application, letters of recommendation, candidate interviews, situational exercises, and simulations (Cascio & Aguinis, 2019; Chiavenato, 2019). In addition to these methods, some organizations use tests that measure cognitive abilities, personality, intelligence, or aptitude. The effort often required in recruitment and selection is aimed at improving organizational performance and increasing the satisfaction of service users (Dumitriu et al., 2023).

Research on recruitment and selection in the third sector is scarce. In the systematic literature review conducted by Cooper et al. (2020), very few studies related to these two processes in this type of organization were found. However, it has been shown that for NPOs to be more effective and improve their governance, they must focus on strategic planning and human-resource management (Oliveira et al., 2021). Another study revealed that when recruitment and employee selection in NPOs are effective, operational performance improves (Abrokwah et al., 2018). These authors found that recruitment and selection promote employee commitment, which in turn influences performance. Specifically, Abrokwah et al. (2018) state that if employees perceive recruitment and selection to be fair, they are more likely to demonstrate organizational commitment. In the study conducted by Funk (2018) in Chilean NPOs, it was found that although these organizations recognize the value of recruitment and selection activities, they face challenges in attracting and retaining competent employees. Among the factors that hinder employee selection is the lack of specialized human-resource personnel (Funk, 2018).

One decisive aspect of the recruitment phase is the medium the organization chooses to publish the job announcement. Research has shown that two of the most widely used media by NPOs are websites and social networks (Funk, 2018). In Funk's (2018) study, the most commonly adopted technique for evaluating candidates was the interview, although one organization stated that they used personality tests. Another decisive factor in recruitment is the amount of time that elapses between the posting of the job announcement and the hiring decision. It has been found that it takes NPOs a long time from the start of recruitment until selection is completed (Funk, 2018), which may prompt applicants to accept another job offer.

Although no studies were found in Puerto Rico specifically addressing recruitment and selection in NPOs, this topic has been explored in governmental and private organizations. In the study by Pérez et al. (2007), a survey was conducted with 109 organizations, although the sectors they belonged to were not specified. Among the study's findings was

that the two most frequently used selection methods were the résumé and the interview. They also found that the most commonly adopted methods for managerial positions were panel interviews, individual interviews, and situational exercises.

Another study carried out in Puerto Rico was conducted by Cordero and Caballero (2014). They administered a questionnaire on recruitment and selection practices to 18 government agencies in the Executive Branch. The authors found that the most commonly used recruitment type was closed or internal recruitment (77.0%). Additionally, most of the surveyed agencies (72.0%) evaluate only academic preparation and experience, which in government is known as "examination without appearance," as scores are assigned based on information provided by candidates in the job application. Another relevant finding was that most agencies did not evaluate their recruitment and selection processes to determine whether they were effective.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, recruitment and employee selection have had to be adapted by organizations to continue their operations. For example, in the United States and Canada, several reports already highlight layoffs and resignations as one of the most significant impacts of the pandemic on the third sector (Akingbola, 2020). In the study by Filantropía Puerto Rico (2022), it was found that 17.2% of the surveyed Puerto Rican NPOs experienced staff loss due to COVID-19. In this regard, Kuenzi et al. (2021) emphasize the need to document the changes the third sector has experienced in relation to its workforce because of COVID-19. Based on this information, the purpose of this research was to describe the recruitment and employee-selection strategies being adopted by NPOs. In addition, the study sought to explore whether the COVID-19 pandemic affected the ways in which NPOs recruit and select their workforce.

## Methodology

This research was non-experimental, descriptive in scope, quantitative, and cross-sectional. For data collection, an online questionnaire with two sections was administered: one section of sociodemographic questions and another section of questions related to

recruitment and selection strategies. In addition, questions were included to determine whether COVID-19 produced any type of change in the way NPOs recruit and select employees.

The participant sample was selected by convenience. Furthermore, participating organizations had to have at least 10 employees. This may have limited the sample because, as discussed in the introduction, only 36.2% of NPOs reported having employees, and many of these do not have 10 or more employees. Also, not having access to an updated database made it difficult to establish communication with many organizations. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Specifically, frequencies and contingency tables were analyzed.

## Results and Discussion

The sample consisted of 24 directors or individuals responsible for NPOs that provide direct services to the population in Puerto Rico. Of all the NPOs surveyed, 50.0% responded that they held the position of Executive Director in their organization; 25.0% reported being a Human Resources Manager or Director; 12.0% stated they were a Human Resources Officer; 8.0% reported being a Manager or Director of an office; and finally, 4.2% stated they were the Assistant to the General Director. Additionally, 37.5% of the organizations indicated having 10 to 25 employees; 41.7% stated they had 26 to 100 employees, while 20.8% reported having 101 to 500 employees.

In 2015, 33.3% of the NPOs reported operational expenses under \$100,000 annually, while 28.5% indicated that their operational expenses were between \$100,001 and \$500,000 annually. Furthermore, 38.1% of the organizations reported expenses of \$750,001 or more. In contrast, in 2020, 14.3% of NPOs reported operational expenses under \$100,000 annually. This means that of the 24 NPOs, four organizations showed an increase in expenses. Table 1 presents a comparison of operational expenses for 2015 and 2020.

**Table 1.** Comparison of operational expenses for 2015 and 2020.

Operational expense amount	Year			
	2015		2020	
	n	%	n	%
under \$100.000	7	33,3	3	14,3
\$100.001-\$250.000	2	9,5	3	14,3
\$250.000-\$500.000	4	19,0	6	28,6
\$500.001-\$750.000	0	0,0	3	14,3
\$750.001-\$1.000.000	2	9,5	0	,0
over \$1.000.000	6	28,6	6	28,6
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100,0</b>

The questionnaire also included a question related to the type of services offered by the organization. To answer this question, organizations could select more than one type of service. Most organizations responded that they offer social services (82.6%). Table 2 shows the types of services offered by the surveyed NPOs.

**Table 2.** Types of services offered by the surveyed NPOs.

Type of services	n	%
Social services	19	82,6%
Education, training, and research	16	69,6%
Legal and rights advocacy	10	43,5%
Recreation and sports	7	30,4%
Health	7	30,4%
Economic development	6	26,1%
Housing and shelter	5	21,7%
Arts and culture	5	21,7%
Environmental well-being	4	17,4%
Religious activities	1	4,3%

Finally, organizations were asked in which municipalities they were located. A total of 58.3% of NPOs reported that their organization was located in municipalities within the metropolitan area of Puerto Rico. Meanwhile, 20.8% stated they were located outside the metropolitan area, and another 20.8%

reported that their organization was located in several towns both inside and outside the metropolitan area of Puerto Rico.

Below are the results related to the employee recruitment strategies used by the surveyed NPOs. However, the survey included two questions to determine whether NPOs had a job classification plan and/or a compensation plan, since recruitment and selection decisions should take both plans into account. The vast majority of organizations (75.0%) reported having a classification plan or a list of job titles with their corresponding requirements. Meanwhile, 66.7% of organizations stated that they had established salaries or had salary policies that include a compensation plan. Additionally, 50.0% of organizations indicated having neither of the two plans. This means that approximately half have only one of the plans but not both. Before recruiting and selecting employees, it is necessary to conduct a job analysis that results in a classification plan and a compensation plan (Conte & Landy, 2019). Consequently, it is essential that NPOs have both plans to outline job requirements. These requirements are used to determine the recruitment type, where the job advertisement is posted, and the methods used to select personnel.

Regarding recruitment strategies, 66.7% of the surveyed organizations indicated having a recruitment plan. According to Breaugh (2008), an organization must clearly establish its recruitment objectives, its strategy for filling vacancies, and the activities it will carry out—elements that are indispensable to a recruitment plan. All surveyed organizations mentioned relying on job descriptions containing essential functions and competencies or taking into account the tasks that must be performed. However, only half (12) take the classification plan into account when recruiting personnel. Additionally, only 45.8% of NPOs apply their compensation plan when recruiting individuals. Classification and compensation plans are the basis of the information needed to recruit and select personnel (Fredericksen et al., 2016; Snell et al., 2016).

When asked about the mechanisms used to publish job postings, 95.8% recruit via social media, while

29.2% use the organization's website. Meanwhile, 16.7% recruit through newspapers, radio, and/or television. In addition, 12.5% reported using online job search platforms. These results align with the literature review, which has found that NPOs tend to rely more on social media to recruit new employees who sympathize with the organization's mission (Ben-Ner & Ren, 2015; Funk, 2018). Recruitment through social media helps facilitate access to quality applicants, generates more favorable responses, helps meet established deadlines, and ensures cost savings (Muduli & Trivedi, 2020).

In the last two positions they filled, 45.8% of NPOs used external recruitment and a combination of internal and external recruitment, so only 8.3% of organizations used exclusively internal recruitment. Although recruiting paid personnel can be a challenge for NPOs, the influx of human capital from other sectors can have a positive influence (Suh, 2018). Suh's (2018) research found that public employees tend to transition to NPOs when they feel more satisfied with intrinsic rewards—those derived from the satisfaction an individual receives from performing a task.

As part of the research, a question was included to identify the incentives that NPOs believed attracted people to work for their organization. Of the total sample, 70.8% of NPOs responded that the rewards that most attract people are the motivation to contribute and help, and the work environment. Meanwhile, 45.8% believed that competitive salaries and medical plans were the main incentives. According to Word and Park (2015), a clearly defined culture of intrinsic rewards is important for selecting and retaining qualified employees in NPOs. The surveyed NPOs seem to understand that the incentives most likely to attract employees are intrinsic or those that do not involve a monetary benefit.

Of all the NPOs surveyed, 87.5% responded that they had faced challenges in recruiting employees in the past 12 months. Specifically, all the organizations with operating expenses greater than \$250,000 faced challenges in recruiting employees. Among the challenges they mentioned was having few candidates apply for the vacant position. They also

emphasized that some candidates who apply do not meet the requirements or are not qualified for specialized positions. Another challenge is related to the salaries they can offer candidates, which are often not competitive, and the fact that the nature of the job does not provide job security. A total of 42.8% of the organizations indicated that people do not show up for interviews or that they sign the contract and then do not show up to work. In addition, 90.5% of the organizations responded that the positions in which they have faced challenges are those related to core services. Meanwhile, 23.8% replied that they had faced recruitment challenges in managerial and technology-related positions. Two organizations mentioned that the generations entering the labor market and generational gaps are a challenge for finding personnel. These challenges are consistent with the literature review (Filantropía Puerto Rico, 2022; Funk, 2018). Despite offering low salaries, the mission of an NPO can help attract and retain employees (Slatten et al., 2021). Specifically, these authors explain that employees who feel that the organization's values align with their own may feel more attracted to working for an NPO. Furthermore, Slatten et al. (2021) explain that smaller NPOs have difficulty attracting talented employees because they lack an effective brand or have not become well-known enough.

As part of the questionnaire, questions related to the employee selection process were also included. One of the questions sought to determine whether NPOs use a description of the functions, duties, or competencies of the position to select employees in their organization. All NPOs responded that they rely on this information to select personnel. This description of functions, duties, or competencies—which is obtained from the job analysis—has the purpose of developing or identifying selection methods (American Psychological Association, 2018). Therefore, it is important for NPOs to continue making decisions related to employee selection based on information about the functions, duties, and competencies of the position.

They were also asked which methods they used to select the last two non-managerial positions. The vast majority of organizations (91.3%) chose résumé

evaluation as the method for selecting employees. The second most frequently chosen method was evaluation of the job application (65.2%), while the third was the structured in-person interview (56.5%). For managerial positions, all indicated that they evaluated the résumé. The second most used selection method for managerial positions was the structured in-person interview (72.7%), and the third method was letters of recommendation (50.0%). Only six employ some type of test, such as written, intelligence, or performance tests. For non-managerial positions, 95.8% of NPOs use two or more methods to select employees, while 91.7% use two or more methods for managerial positions.

When comparing these results with the literature review, it was found that, according to Cascio and Aguinis (2019), the most widely used selection method is the job application. Furthermore, interviews and résumé evaluation have been found to be the two most widely used selection methods (Pérez et al., 2007). Since only 25% of the NPOs surveyed use selection tests, it is crucial for them to consider incorporating written tests for selecting employees. It has been found that the two combinations with the highest multivariable validity and utility for predicting job performance are (a) administering a general mental ability test along with an integrity test (mean validity .78) and (b) a general mental ability test along with a structured interview (mean validity .76) (Schmidt et al., 2016).

Another aspect addressed in the questionnaire was whether the validity of any of their methods for selecting personnel had been examined. The majority of the organizations reported that the validity of their selection methods is not evaluated (83.3%) nor their reliability (91.0%). Two organizations indicated that the type of validity examined is content validity, while one stated that the reliability of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) is evaluated. This means that most reported not knowing whether the validity or reliability of their selection methods had been evaluated. It is crucial that NPOs also know whether the methods they are using to select their personnel have been examined to determine their validity and reliability. According to Schmidt et al. (2016), the most important psychometric property of a personnel

assessment method is predictive validity, which consists of the ability to predict future job performance. The development, evaluation, and implementation of systematic selection systems in which validity and reliability are assessed allows for improved prediction of desired job outcomes and helps avoid bias in employment decisions (American Psychological Association, 2018).

To evaluate the effectiveness of recruitment and personnel selection processes, 58.3% of the NPOs indicated that they use the number of people who apply for the job as a reference. Meanwhile, half of the organizations stated that they consider the time elapsed between posting the vacancy and hiring, as well as the retention rate. A total of 41.7% stated that they evaluate the quality of applicants; 37.5%, employees' perceptions of both processes; 12.5%, the number of people who view the job posting; and two organizations conduct surveys with candidates. Finally, four organizations reported that they do not evaluate recruitment or personnel selection. For organizations to systematically improve their recruitment and selection, it is necessary for them to evaluate the effectiveness of both systems (Carlson et al., 2002). The majority of NPOs surveyed indicated that they evaluate these processes (93.9%). However, only 10 evaluate the quality of applicants. According to Carlson et al. (2002), it is not enough to measure the number of candidates who apply; the quality of applicants must also be evaluated. This author presents a practical model for evaluating recruitment which consists of (a) measuring the results of attracting candidates, (b) quantifying the performance potential of each applicant, and (c) analyzing the costs associated with personnel recruitment and estimating the benefits in monetary terms.

One of the objectives of the research was to determine whether NPOs had experienced changes in their recruitment and selection due to COVID-19. A total of 75.0% of the NPOs responded that the pandemic has caused changes in the way personnel are recruited. Among the changes caused by the pandemic is that candidates prefer virtual interviews. Regarding this issue, one organization indicated that this has streamlined the recruitment and interview process. However, one organization commented that this

change has also resulted in some candidates not showing up for interviews, something that did not occur as frequently when interviews were conducted in person. Another change highlighted by seven organizations was that people now prefer to work remotely. Furthermore, 41.7% indicated that they have faced difficulties due to the pandemic because people prefer to work on their own or have lower availability to work.

Meanwhile, 66.7% of the organizations indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has not caused changes in the way people are selected in their organization. The six NPOs that have experienced changes expressed that one of these is giving opportunities to people without experience but with academic preparation. They also mentioned that interviews began to be conducted virtually and that employees prefer to work remotely.

These results are consistent with other studies. COVID-19 has changed the way work is organized and how decisions related to human resources are made (Gigauri, 2020; Mujtaba, 2022). Most of the organizations surveyed have experienced changes in their recruitment of employees; many of these changes are related to preferring virtual interviews and remote work, which is consistent with the literature review (Vij et al., 2023). In addition, one study found that during the pandemic in the German public sector, a greater number of job postings allowed working from home (Koch et al., 2021). Similarly, the study conducted by Filantropía Puerto Rico (2022) found that 17.2% of the Puerto Rican NPOs surveyed had faced a loss of personnel due to COVID-19.

According to Presti and Mendes (2023), due to COVID-19 a new paradigm has emerged that focuses on skills required for remote work and psychological characteristics suitable for the post-pandemic period. Therefore, according to these authors, personnel in charge of human resources had to make adjustments and prioritize digitalization, collaboration, and remote communication. It is recommended that organizations reexamine conventional labor policies so that they adapt to the new reality of teleworking (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). The study by De Vincenzi et al. (2022) confirmed that remote work is not intrinsically

positive or negative but depends on personal and organizational factors. For example, organizational factors such as leadership, support from coworkers, and job autonomy can influence employees' perceptions positively or negatively.

## Conclusions

This article examined the recruitment and personnel selection strategies being adopted by NPOs in Puerto Rico and whether the COVID-19 pandemic produced any type of change in these two processes. The results suggest that although organizations use job descriptions for recruiting, only half take into account information from their classification or compensation plan. In this sense, opportunities may be lost to view the position within the context of the entire organization and the recent changes experienced in other positions.

According to the results, eight organizations do not have a recruitment plan. The recruitment process, rather than an unforeseen event, must be understood as an activity with great impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. To the extent that the process is planned with clear objectives and strategies for filling each vacancy, the NPO will be in a better position to select the ideal people to fill them. This research also found that social media has become a preferred mechanism for recruitment, which may lead to greater efficiency for the organization by eliminating the need to publish advertisements in newspapers or to pay companies.

Another recommendation is for NPOs to analyze the validity and reliability of their selection methods. Furthermore, since most have faced challenges due to COVID-19, it is recommended that they make adjustments to the way they recruit and select personnel to adapt to the new reality created by the pandemic. By following these recommendations, they can become more effective, improve organizational performance, promote commitment, and increase satisfaction.

Although NPOs face changes due to COVID-19, it is important that they make the necessary adjustments and prioritize digitalization and flexibility in human resources processes. These adjustments pose

challenges that must be addressed to ensure the continuity of the organization itself. Likewise, they require strengthening internal capacities to implement technologies, adapt labor policies, and respond to new employee expectations. Finally, it is essential for organizations to develop sustainable strategies that allow them to attract and select personnel in an increasingly competitive and changing labor environment.

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