KIRBY PARTNERS

Preparing for an Executive Interview Presentation

Plan your approach

Kirby Partners' clients may request a presentation as part of the interview process, giving search committees another way to understand how candidates think through complex issues.

Our team is here to support you as you prepare. The guidance below reflects the best practices we most often share with candidates ahead of these interviews.

- Start by making sure you fully understand the assignment. Review the materials carefully, identify each question and requirement, and consider creating a checklist to ensure you address each one.
- Make your approach specific to the organization you are interviewing with. Think about its priorities, current work, recent changes, and what you've learned during the interview process, rather than relying on what has worked in other organizations.
- Use prior experience to support your thinking, without assuming what worked elsewhere will work in the situation presented.
- Be explicit about what you are assuming. Separate what you know from what you are inferring, especially when those assumptions affect your recommendations. Also explain what information you would want to confirm if you were in the role.
- If you use generative AI during preparation, make sure the recommendations, reasoning, and examples still reflect your own judgment and experience. Generic language or familiar frameworks can detract from an otherwise strong presentation.

Build the case

- Give the presentation a clear structure and a small number of takeaways. Organize the content so the committee can easily follow your thinking from the problem or opportunity through your recommendations and priorities.
- Present at the executive level. Focus on the decisions, tradeoffs, risks, stakeholders, and outcomes that matter most. Use technical or operational details only when they help explain your thinking, and move supporting information to the appendix or the discussion.
- Use examples to demonstrate relevant experience without letting them take over the presentation. The PAR technique (Problem, Action, Result), commonly used in interviews, can provide a simple structure. Establish the context quickly, make your role and decisions clear, and focus on what you did and the results that followed.
- Think not only about what you would do, but also how you would do it. Identify who you would involve, where you would take direct responsibility, and where you would influence.
- Show how you would set priorities and make tradeoffs. Explain what deserves attention first, what can wait, and why. Avoid giving every issue equal weight.
- When you suggest a governance model, framework, committee, or process, explain its purpose and how it would improve things like decision-making, accountability, speed, or alignment.
- If relevant, connect your long-term direction to the early steps you would take in the role. Explain what you would focus on first, which relationships you would build, and what you would need to learn before moving forward.
- Define what success looks like and choose a small number of meaningful measures that would show whether your approach is working.

Make the most of the presentation

- Confirm the presentation format and logistics in advance. Make sure you understand the timing, technology, file format, and any submission requirements.
- Leave enough room for discussion. When the format allows, reserving roughly 40 percent of the available time for dialogue is a useful target. If presentation and Q&A time are specified separately, finish comfortably within the presentation window.
- Rehearse enough to know your timing and where you have flexibility. Be clear on which messages are essential and which supporting points can be shortened or skipped.
- Treat questions as an opportunity to demonstrate your thinking. Answer directly, explain your reasoning, and adjust your perspective when new information or context warrants it.

Keep slides simple and focused

The biggest slide mistake we see is trying to include too much information. A strong deck makes it easy for the audience to understand the point of each slide quickly.

- Choose a professional and understated slide template. A color palette that complements the organization’s brand can work well, but avoid recreating its templates or using its logo in a way that makes the deck look like an official organizational document.
- Keep the design consistent from slide to slide, using a limited number of layouts, fonts, and visual treatments.
- Focus each slide on one main message and include only what the audience needs to understand it.
- Write slide titles that communicate the takeaway rather than simply naming the topic.
- Use bullets rather than paragraphs, leave enough white space, and use a font size that is easy to read from across the room.
- Ensure charts, diagrams, and frameworks are used only when they make the point easier to understand.
- Move nonessential data, methodology, and technical detail to the appendix.

Final presentation review

As you're finalizing the presentation, review it from the search committee's perspective.

- What are the three or four things I want the committee to remember? Does the presentation make those priorities unmistakable?
- Where am I most likely to be challenged, and can I explain my reasoning without relying on the slide?
- Does the presentation show how I would work with the people around me, not just what I would do?
- Have I made any assumptions sound like facts?
- Is there anything in the deck that is there mainly to demonstrate expertise rather than advance the discussion?
- Does the language sound like me, or has it become generic?
- Where can I cut the presentation to create more room for discussion if needed?
- Have I completed a final proofread for typos, formatting inconsistencies, and factual or numerical errors?

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