

Six Steps for Successful Board Recruitment

1. Evaluate your current board

There are several assessment tools you can use to evaluate the composition of your current board. The skills and expertise needed on a board will vary depending on the type of organization, but most nonprofit boards will need to take the following factors in to consideration:

- **Is the board representative of the community?** Demographic considerations may include age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, etc. Also, what demographic considerations are suggested by your mission? Most organizations try to represent the client or customer in the leadership of the organization when possible. For example, an HIV/AIDS service organization might prioritize recruiting board members who are living with HIV/AIDS.
- **Do you have the range of skills and experience needed to govern the organization?** Nonprofit board responsibilities include legal responsibility for the organization, financial management, fundraising, setting policy, hiring the executive director, and setting the vision and mission of the organization. Ideally, your board will have legal, accounting and finance, fundraising, human resources skills as well as some individuals who are well-versed in your issue area (i.e. homelessness, theater arts, education).

One simple way to assess the skills sets and experience sets of your current members is to create a grid with the factors you feel are important along the top and the names of board members along the side. Fill in the grid and look for gaps.

2. Empower a Nominating or Board Development Committee.

Now that you know what types of board members you need, delegate primary responsibility for stewarding the board development process to a person or a committee. Usually the board president is involved, and sometimes he or she carries primary responsibility for recruitment. This can be a problem in some boards, however, since the board president has many demands on his or her time. Have a discussion amongst your board to determine who will be the primary contact(s) for prospective board members. This person should be willing to make time to talk with and meet with potential board members. If a committee is created, make sure there is good coordination among members.

3. Make sure that there is a clear a process for board elections.

A prerequisite to recruiting is having a clearly defined process for electing new board members. If your process is unclear, delegate the development of a board development plan to a committee. Your elections process is usually outlined in the by-laws, so check here first and be sure to present any changes to your method of doing elections as a formal amendment to the by-laws. Some by-laws also talk about the size and composition of the board, so check to make sure you are in compliance!

4. Develop board recruitment materials.

You should have a board member job description, and honestly present the responsibilities of sitting on your board to prospective members. Also, a board recruitment package should include general materials about your program (such as a brochure) and recent newsletters and/or an annual report. As with major donors, you want to impress and excite potential board members about the work you are doing.

5. Recruit!

With your “dream board member” profiles in mind, begin generating a list of prospect names, and contacting them. The more personal the approach, the better. Expect to get yes’s, no’s and maybe’s, and be sure to ask people who say no for recommendations of other people who may be interested and/or qualified to serve. Also, take people at face value if they decline. For example, if people say “I’m too busy right now,” ask if you can keep them on your mailing list and check back in six months or a year.

6. Train new members.

Be sure that you provide new members with the tools for success. This includes a thorough orientation to the organization and ongoing training. This is particularly important for members who have never served on a board before. Harvard research studies show that the biggest reason that board members are inactive is that they don’t know what they are supposed to do!

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