



PERSPECTIVES

...on Building Better Non-profit Board Membership.

Last month, Perspectives offered some insights on identifying and recruiting new board members. This month's feature takes a closer look at grooming potential board talent and increasing the likelihood a desirable candidate will accept the position when offered.

Utilize the Committee Process.

Don't overlook the potential of committees and special projects as proving grounds for likely board members – the next generation of leaders every organization needs to cultivate on a regular basis. Standing committees and special projects can be great environments for identifying leadership potential while energizing agency projects.

One of the advantages here is initial recruiting. Attracting individuals to help with time-limited projects is easier and less intimidating for a potential volunteer. Meanwhile, the time spent on the project will broaden your recruits' expertise, and give you the opportunity to determine potential board members interests and abilities.

To facilitate the process, sub-committees for specific projects should be managed by proven volunteers and staff in order to evaluate prospective new leaders. These committees should be well organized and planned – members should have specific roles, be well qualified for the task in hand, and function according to efficient operating rules.

The better organized and conceived the committee, the better the personal interaction. Working with new volunteers within a committee structure provides an opportunity to educate the volunteer about your organization and increase the volunteer's commitment to your mission.

Analyze your Current Board.

Keep your organization's mission in mind, and objectively analyze your current board to determine both its breadth of expertise and its community representation. Is anything lacking? Is there a critical skill not present, or a constituency not represented? Just as important, are there skills or representation on your Board right now that might not be there in a year or two? Use what is (or soon will be) missing to guide your choices when creating a pool of volunteers for potential board service. Look to fill the

gaps as you evaluate talent among those who have proven themselves to your organization. Those are the people you want to honor with a seat on your board.

Provide a Board Position Description.

Define your objectives. Any kind of service is easier to accept when its expectations and responsibilities are clearly understood. When someone is asked to join your board, they should be provided with a written description of the expectations of membership, including roles and responsibilities. There should be no ambiguity about what is expected: ranging from the term of service and the frequency of meetings to the scope of board responsibilities.

Structure the Recruiting Process.

All recruiting should be coordinated through a nominating committee. All recommendations generated by your organization's board and staff should be considered at the committee level and compared with the needs identified in the board analysis.

Communicate the Benefits of Board Service.

Most individuals who already serve on a nonprofit board need no justification for being a board member. They know perfectly well what they are doing and why they want to continue doing it. However, there are those who may be reluctant to join a board, or who need a compelling reason why. Here are some reasons why people join nonprofit boards:

- It can be fun.
 - They know their skills are needed.
 - They recognize the nonprofit is going to be better because of their contributions.
 - They can effect change in an organization.
 - They enjoy collaborating with people who have the same interests and values.
 - They learn new skills.
 - They give back to the community.
 - They will have an impact.
 - They will feel good by doing good.
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