



PERSPECTIVES

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

These suggestions for identifying and cultivating new board members appeared in a series of *Perspectives* articles run in 2004. We feel these are critical points for non-profit agencies to keep in mind, and are worth repeating.

Look Within:

You may not need to look very far to find a strong board member – the perfect candidate may have been volunteering in various capacities for your agency for years. The same volunteers who perform the routine tasks that make up your mission statement may be untapped sources of board talent. Certainly, they come equipped with proven commitment to your organization, an insider's knowledge of how it functions at the grass roots level, and some sense of its strengths and weaknesses. Your donor and client lists also might yield potential candidates. In both cases, you won't have to familiarize them with your organization – they will already know a great deal about it.

Plan for the future:

If you don't feel you have these resources in place, try the following volunteer development strategies.

Utilize the Committee Process to Groom New Talent:

Expand your committee structure beyond the ranks of the present board membership.

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.

Engaging people through sub-committees and special projects provides two critical opportunities - volunteers get to learn a great deal about your organization, and you get to see your potential next generation board members in action. This creates an in-house development program that allows potential board members to grow into the position.

Advertise to your own community:

Use your organization's newsletter to speak directly to your most attentive, most supportive audience. Place a "help wanted" ad in the newsletter when volunteer opportunities arise. "We're looking for talented and conscientious volunteers. If you can contribute one evening a month and have skills or contacts in accounting, publicity or special event fund-raising, call us at xxx-xxxx to find out if this volunteer opportunity is right for you." This pool of volunteer talent becomes the recruiting ground for a "new talent" developmental program.

Filling board vacancies should not be a last-minute undertaking. On the contrary, it involves strategic, long-term planning that starts today. It is a process; if done well, a long process that involves identifying, nurturing, and grooming the right people for the right jobs. Done successfully, the strength of your organization will increase along with the quality of your board.