



PERSPECTIVES

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

Governance is the current buzzword for non-profits, and a key to governance is having the right people, policies and procedures in place. It's timely to repeat some points on recruiting board members from *Perspectives* articles run in 2004. We feel these are critical points for non-profit agencies to keep in mind.

Structure Your Recruiting and Nominating Process:

Nomination and election of solid board members is bedrock to a good non-profit. Establish policies around the process. Determine when new members can be added and identify the basic skill sets your organization needs. Determine terms and limits, and expectations for board members. Develop a board member position description. Assign on-going board development to an identified committee – board members whose job is to accept all ideas for board membership from the rest of the board and staff and recruit the best candidate. All recruiting should be coordinated through this committee.

Analyze your Current Board and Identify Your Need:

Long before you think about individuals to join your board, you need to think about overall board composition and balance of expertise. Once you've established your process and identified your needs, then it will be time to start recruiting right people. Analyze your board membership. Before you think "personalities" think skills. What knowledge are you lacking? 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. Above all, 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, look ahead. 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 considering 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.

Your designated committee will be composed of volunteers who are familiar with all board responsibilities. In some cases, you may want to include your Executive Director when you call upon your potential board member. When recruiting, be sure to...

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.

Provide a Board Position Description:

Define the role of board membership. 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, meeting dates and times. 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.

Once They Say Yes:

Recruiting doesn't end once the new board member has agreed to join your organization. Your committee should hold a board orientation for new members. Provide them information covering all the basics of your organization - including operations, finance, the past year's goals, achievements and board minutes. Also consider assigning a mentor to each new member. Someone they might already know, who can introduce them to the other board members and the organization.

The search for good board members may be a challenge, especially if you are just starting an organized method of recruitment. See next month's *Perspectives* for ways to identify and cultivate new board members.