



RECRUITING BOARD MEMBERS

Having an organized recruitment process in place not only makes it possible to fill vacancies on a board in an effective and speedy manner, but it creates a foundation for building a skillful and diverse board. It allows the organization to cultivate potential candidates and to prepare them to join the board when the time is right.

Board profile

To achieve the best results, define goals first. Start by analyzing the present composition of your board. A board profile can help you determine the specific skills and qualities that would benefit your board. Do you need to find more people who are particularly well connected with your constituents? Is your board diverse enough to enable you to benefit from different points of view? Do you need extra fundraising capacity? BoardSource has an extensive sample matrix tool in its publication *The Board Building Cycle: Nine Steps to Finding, Recruiting, and Engaging Nonprofit Board Members*.

Governance committee

The search for board members should be ongoing. The role of the governance committee is essential for board member recruitment as it focuses on this process on a regular basis. Normally the board chair appoints members to this committee who know the organization thoroughly, have extensive contacts in the community, and are fair judges of candidates. Their task is to find the best candidates, convince them of the benefits of board service, present the candidates to the full board, and after the final nomination, make sure the new board members are well equipped to do the best possible job.

Search strategies

A continually changing and growing pool of candidates adds to the success of a governance committee. Committee members constantly need to observe their environment and community to locate suitable prospects. At the same time, valuable people must be made to feel that they want to be part of this particular organization. Committee members need to enhance the profile of the organization and make its mission known. They need to portray the board member's role objectively and accurately as well as laying out the challenge in positive terms. In other words, mere willingness to join is not enough; explicit commitment to serve is a must.

The chief executive's role in the recruitment process

The chief executive, having the most intimate knowledge of the organization, can provide valuable assistance to the nominating committee by assessing the board's current needs, identifying valuable prospects, and helping to inform and integrate new board members into their new roles. Some nonprofit leaders believe that the chief executive should be excluded from the recruitment process because of the possibility of a conflict of interest. Either way, however, it is the full board that votes on the admission of new members.

Cultivation process

Molding prospects into willing, eager, and capable new board members can be time-consuming. Decide first who is going to make the initial contact. If a board member knows the prospect, he or she might extend an invitation to the first meeting. The chair should follow up with a letter and appropriate material describing the organization. Subsequent contacts can build on previous feedback. They may include an invitation to your special events (concert, exhibition), a tour of the services (homeless center, hospice unit, new office building), lunch with board members, or encouragement to attend a board meeting. But it is important to be sensitive to the reaction of the prospect: if he or she clearly indicates that this is not the right time for him/her to take on additional responsibilities, you should acknowledge it. Either renew contact at a later date or devise alternate ways for him or her to contribute.

Extending the invitation

If the pursuit has been successful and the prospect clearly indicates his or her willingness to being considered as an official candidate (after understanding what the commitment means), the governance committee presents him or her to the full board for a vote. Voting on new board members takes place annually as the time arrives for some of the board members to rotate off after their term is up; it also may be necessary to fill a sudden vacancy. After the board has approved membership, the chair or another suitable board member will extend an official invitation to the newly chosen member.

Orientation

All newly elected board members need a thorough orientation, no matter how extensive their previous board

experience is. Every board has its special characteristics, personal dynamics, requirements for involvement, and a structure that needs clarification. The governance committee with the chief executive's involvement is normally in the best position to organize regular orientation for new board members, taking care to invite as many current members as possible.

References

The Board Building Cycle: Nine Steps to Finding, Recruiting, and Engaging Nonprofit Board Members

Nonprofit Board Answer Book

Both are available at www.boardsource.org or by calling 202-349-2500.

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