

BOARD RECRUITMENT/ENGAGEMENT:

Finding good, productive, helpful, generous board members is difficult and especially for small and midsize nonprofit groups. A good board can help an organization reach their goals, achieve financial stability, enhance their stature and many other things. A bad board can kill an organization or just cripple it. Board recruitment should be very strategic. Each new board member should bring value to the organization through financial connections, valuable expertise, and commitment to the organization's mission and values. They should reflect the community with men and women from all cultural backgrounds.

Where do you find these paragons of leadership? Start with your bank. Bankers generally make great board members. They understand finance, know people with money and are generally people-oriented. Ask your banking contact to connect with you with a high-level bank staff member and contact them directly. Ask for what you want – a high-level bank employee who might be interested in your organization. Send them a board job description that lays out duties and responsibilities and clearly states the financial and time commitment. [Download The Sample Board Job Description Template](#)

Are there corporations in your community that are active in supporting nonprofit groups in your sector? Do some research to find out which ones appear to be a good match for your organization and contact the person who is over their philanthropic area or their external affairs area. Send them an email and introduce yourself, your organization, and let them know you're interested in a high-level employee as a board member. Send them the board job description.

Read the Business Journal or Business Section of the local newspaper. Watch for announcements of new hires who fit your needs, or business awards given by the Business Journal such as "Forty Under Forty" or "Best Female Entrepreneur", etc. If you see someone who looks promising, check them out on LinkedIn to see if you have any connections in common. If you do, ask your connection to do an introduction. Ask your Board and Advisory Board members if they know any of the people you are interested in and if they do, ask them if they think they would be good board members and to make an introduction.

Ask your colleagues in other nonprofits if they have a good board member who is term-limited and if they would consider recommending them to your board and making the introduction.

Look within your patron base for qualified prospects. Do some research to find out more about their qualifications, affiliations, business interests, etc. LinkedIn is a good resource for this and may list other boards they serve on or have served on. Call the executive director at one of those organizations and ask how effective they were as a board member.

Network at events where there are opportunities to meet and talk with people of influence and affluence.

Ask board members for recommendations – this comes with a caveat. Friends of board members may not be what you need. Be specific about the type of candidate you would like to have and discourage stacking a board with "friends" who do not bring anything of value to the organization. Just because they are a "great guy or gal" does not mean they will be a "great" board member.

There is a lot of emphasis on getting specific experience on the board such as an accountant, an attorney, a marketing expert, etc. While it is good to have access to some expertise, not all professionals are created equal. For example, if you are looking for an attorney, look for someone who can bring useful knowledge to your board. If you are a cultural nonprofit, an attorney specializing in Intellectual Property would be helpful. An attorney with understanding of employee law is always helpful. Don't turn down a professional who has passion for your mission just because he or she does not fit a specific need, but if you are just generally looking for expertise, it's OK to look for a specific skill set that adds value to your board.

Here are some common nonprofit board responsibilities:

- Serve as ambassadors in the community
- Protect the organization's reputation and assets
- Annual personal contribution
- Participation in organization events
- Ensure compliance with all legal requirements
- Plan for the future
- Monitor organizational progress
- Look for help if needed
- Set the budget and ensure financial oversight is in place
- Address any serious issues if and when they occur

Here are some symptoms that your board members are not engaged:

- They miss meetings
- They don't follow through on commitments
- They resist efforts to enlist them in active participation
- They don't read the materials and are ill-prepared when they do attend meetings
- High turnover with board members
- Do not meet their financial obligations to the organization

Strategies to engage board members:

- Create a strong onboarding process to make sure they fully understand the organization, it's mission and programs
- Use a Board Commitment Form or contract to be renewed annually
- Use a Board Report Card for each board member to self-report
- Use a Board Report Card Assessment that each board member fills out to assess the entire board's performance each year

Organizations' Obligations to Board:

- Timely, accurate, reports on finances and programs
- Carry Directors and Officers liability insurance
- Opportunities to speak with chief executive
- Collaboration with CEO and Staff with board members
- Establish regular feedback mechanisms such as dashboards