



## Successful Board Recruitment

Every board works to be effective, to be engaged in meaningful work, and to be supportive of the work of the organization. To achieve those goals, a board must continue to recruit other directors who will work for those same goals.

The recruitment process must be organized, thoughtful and ongoing. Developing a thorough approach will help to streamline the process and will ensure that each potential candidate will be treated the same. The governance committee or a board development committee can be responsible for the creation of a process. Bylaws will outline the committee structure and identify which committee will have the overall responsibility for recruitment. Boards generally have nominating committees who assume the implementation of the recruitment activity.

Before an active recruiting process begins, there are several steps that will support the work of the nominating committee.

First, develop a board member job description. This will be very useful as a new director is considering joining the board. What is expected of a board

member? What is the attendance requirement? Committees are an integral part of accomplishing the board's work. How many committees will a director be expected to participate in? What is the expectation for philanthropy? Is every director asked to donate to the organization? This is an expectation that is often not clear, and for some, it could be a barrier to joining the board. It is best to speak of this upfront, so there is no misunderstanding. Board terms should be clearly spelled out.

Then, once a job description is completed, consider developing a matrix of desired skills and the skills that are present on the board with current directors. This matrix is an excellent reference document as you begin to source potential candidates. What areas of expertise might be needed? Are you seeking to become more diverse, whether ethnicity, gender, or the age of members? Do you need members who have certain community connections? The matrix can have any categories that the board values in its members and the matrix will be used as a cross-reference with board candidates' qualifications.

An application form should contain key areas that have been identified in both the job description and the matrix. Having an application process signals just how important the board views the recruitment activity. The application will help the committee discern applicants that may fit the identified matrix of potential new members. It assures that candidates are selected based on a very legitimate process and not selected just because someone recommended them.

So, the next part of the process is the identification of potential new members. All board members are asked to identify possible candidates to share with the nominating committee. The CEO must be included actively in the process. The executive is engaged in the community and will know people who would be a good addition to the board. Having a robust pool

of potential candidates allows the board to be very selective. In a smaller community, most applicants will be known to many, if not all, current members. In some larger communities, the board may engage a search firm to identify and screen candidates. It allows for a broader reach to grow the pool. The nominating committee takes responsibility to review the identified potential candidates and to recommend who should be approached to ascertain their interest in joining the board. Reaching out does not need to be limited to the nominating committee, especially if another board member may have a relationship with someone. Again, having a larger pool to draw from will ensure that the candidates will be the best.

Once an individual indicates an interest, an application should be sent. The applications are reviewed by the committee and there needs to be a consensus about who should be interviewed. The interview process should be rigorous and consistent. Candidates will gain a sense of the seriousness of the board through this interview. It is important to note that people should be asked if they wish to be considered for a position, so it does not seem guaranteed. There could be an issue or a conflict that is identified in the process. The committee needs to be able to say no if necessary. The CEO should be included in the interview process. He or she has in-depth knowledge of the organization and may pick up on different things during the interviews, perhaps a conflict or a different view of the role of leadership vs. the board. If possible, checking references, especially as it relates to a candidate's other board participation, is desirable.

Recruitment is often in response to vacancies or board members who have reached their term limits. But it is wise to continually have an active process. Board size is dictated by the bylaws, and it is helpful to have an up to date list of candidates. You may want to invite potential candidates to join a committee, such as finance or quality. That allows a future member

to learn about the organization and how it functions. Healthcare operations can be difficult to understand and learn, so serving on a committee provides a great learning opportunity.

Once new members have been interviewed and have been asked to join the board, a robust orientation is required. It is through this process that expectations can be reiterated, introductions to the organization's team members are done, and the new member will gain an understanding of the board functions and operations. Every new person should have a mentor. This mentor is available for questions, for introductions to all other board members and for ongoing support as the member becomes involved and engaged. The mentoring process should be planned so each mentor knows what is expected and each new member understands what his or her mentor will be available for. An evaluation at the end of the first year will allow discussion of the member's engagement and will offer the member an opportunity to share concerns or to ask questions. Not every board member works out and an organized process will make a difficult discussion a bit easier. It is never easy, but it is imperative that an effective board must govern and to that end, everyone must fully participate and engage. A high functioning board is transparent and openly discusses and evaluates its own effectiveness.

Time and effort to create a consistent and thoughtful recruitment process will be time well spent. All members are responsible for contributing to the ongoing success of the board. Planning for that success will reap great rewards.

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