

R – Recruitment of Board Members

A Checklist Inactive Board Members

A Ten-Step Checklist for Board Recruitment

By Cynthia Armour

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1. Your mission is your lighthouse (a beacon in the fog)

Clearly express your agency's reason for being and make it pervasive in your organization before you look for people who can help achieve long-term goals. (Placing your mission on all board agencies reminds members where to focus their efforts and votes.)

2. Anticipate Board turn over-well before the AGM

Define your agency's succession strategy, including identification of suitable candidates, script for inviting potential nominees, interview process, selection criteria and who is responsible for ensuring the plan is accomplished.

3. Articulate the agency's culture

Determine and explain the culture of your organization. What stage is the agency at in its life span? What's the lone at the top? Communicate your philosophy on governance, board code of conduct and how it's monitored, oriented for new members, availability of training, conflict of interest policy, board/staff relationship, how the board will be evaluated, and how stewardship of donors and funds will be fulfilled.

4. Know your priorities

Conduct a needs assessment to identify what your agency's priorities are for the next one to three years. What type of leaders will you need to achieve your goals?

5. Identify gaps

Assess the skills and experience of your existing board-do you have a lot of dedicated 'service-providing' individuals who may be weak in leadership and management? Target individuals who have the ability to fill the gaps (e.g) in fundraising, marketing. Make sure there is a broad representation of abilities, ages, gender, cultural diversity, connections and talents on your board.

6. Go beyond 'the pulse'

Good prospective board members have more than a heart beat! Use the same tools for board identification you would for identifying possible donors.

- Linkage (there is a personal contact)
- Ability (the individual has the time and financial means if you expect board donations.)
- Interest (you know enough about the prospect to know what's needed to attract them to your cause.)

7. Definite tasks

Have written job descriptions for all board positions and use them with prospective board members (including fundraising if it's a requirement.) By defining your expectations (responsibilities, terms of office, time commitment, benefits, evaluation measures) prior to recruitment, the individual can accept (or refuse) with full knowledge of those expectations.

8. Know where to find suitable candidates

Solicit nominations and applications from your community. Gather well-connected people (who, you suspect, wouldn't join your board) for a 'one-meeting nominating committee'. Inform them of your mission and invite them to suggest friends or colleagues who could be suitable members. Your fundraising or resource development committee is a wonderful place to 'audition' future board members. Finally, donors may be a useful source (provided their skills match your needs)-and you won't have to convince them to contribute.

9. Be Selective

Interview prospective individuals before inviting them to join. Here are some questions to consider:

“What do you see as the board's role in this organization?”

“What do you feel is the board's role in fundraising?”

“What leadership role might you assume over the next three year period?”

“What motivates you?”

“What would you like our of membership on the board?”

10. Learn from your experience and strive to improve the process

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your recruitment strategy. Ask for feedback from new members and recruiters to determine if the message received matched the one that was sent. Revisit job descriptions to be sure that the information they contain is accurate.

WHAT TO DO WITH BOARD MEMBERS THAT WON'T DO ANYTHING

“He/She never comes to meetings or does anything. Why does he/she even stay on the board?”.

Q. Whose responsibility is it to “do something” about a board member who is “deadwood,” undependable, a procrastinator, or worse?

Answer: Yours!

Every board member shares in the responsibility to involve each board member in contributing to the well-being of the board and the organization. If you’re the board president or an officer, your responsibilities include monitoring non-participation and intervening with board members when necessary. In some cases you may need to talk with the executive director about improving the way he or she works with board members. If you’re the executive director, you may need to discuss the situation with board leadership.

There are two things you must do in the case of a board member who is not participating. First, you must do something. The problem is likely only to get worse, and non-participating board members have a demoralizing impact on even the best of boards.

Second, be confident and hopeful. Many board members just need a little reminder to be more conscientious, and others will be grateful that you’ve given them a graceful way to relinquish tasks or even leave the board. Things will work out.

Short Term Strategies

► Check to be sure that expectations were made clear to the board member before he or she joined the board. “I know you joined the board recently and I’m not sure that you realize that we ask all board members to attend the annual dinner and, hopefully, to help

sell tickets. Let me explain to you what most board members do, so you can see whether you'll be able to work on this with us.”

▶ Hold a board discussion at which expectations are reconsidered are re-affirmed. Agree on a list of expectations for every board member.

▶ Be sensitive to possible health issues or personal reasons why a good board member isn't participating as much as he or she has in the past.

▶ Transfer responsibilities to someone else. “I'm concerned about finishing the revision to the personnel policies. Since you're so busy, it would work out for the best if John took your notes on the policies and developed a first draft.”

▶ Together with the board member, explore whether he or she really has the time right now to be able to be an active board member. “I'm calling to check in with you since you haven't been able to make a meeting in the last several months. Are you just temporarily a lot busier than usual? We really want to have your participation, but if it isn't realistic, perhaps we should see if there's a less time consuming way than board membership for you to be involved.”

Longer Term Strategies

Make it possible for individuals to take a “leave of absence” from the board if they have health, work, or other reasons why they cannot participate fully for awhile. An individual can, for example, take a “6 month maternity leave” or a “disability leave.”

▶ Have a board discussion or a written board survey on what makes it difficult for people to participate fully. “Are there things we can change about the frequency, day, time, or length of board meetings that would make it easier for you to attend?” Are there things about the way the board meetings are conducted that would make it easier for you to attend or that would give you more reason to want to attend?.”

► Consider whether board participation is meaningful to board members. Have lunch with some of the “semi-active” members and/or the executive director: “I’m sensing that board participation just isn’t as substantive or significant as some board members want it to be. What do you think are the reasons, and what do you think we can do to make board membership more meaningful.

► Revise what is expected of board members. Perhaps responsibilities have been given to a board member that is unrealistic for any but the super-board-member. Reduce the number of committees and utilize short-term task forces instead. Redesign jobs and responsibilities to fit the ability of a busy achiever to accomplish them.

Adapted from an article by Jan Masaoka.

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