



Executive Leadership Resources Board Member Recruitment

The challenges and opportunities facing non-profit organizations require the leadership of capable and committed board members. Identifying prospective board members who are competent, available and who share your organization's mission is the result of a proactive and persistent strategy.

The ideas outlined below are intended to be a resource to boards who:

- Wish to develop a more intentional board member recruitment plan
- Are exploring ways to improve their current recruitment process

As you develop your board member recruitment plan or seek to improve it, the following ideas may be useful.

Assign Responsibility

Since recruitment of new members is a responsibility of the board, the board needs to determine who will coordinate this important function. The Governance Committee is frequently assigned this essential function. While the CEO may be an ex-officio member of this committee, recruitment of board members should not be left to the CEO.

Make Recruitment an Ongoing Function

Boards that have an informal recruitment process generally begin thinking about recruitment when an opening is imminent. As a result, these boards may find themselves scrambling to find a replacement when a board opening comes up.

Maintain a profile that includes a list of current board members with their demographic information as well as areas of expertise and other relevant information. Periodically review the profile in light of the changing needs of the board and identify the competencies and characteristics that will be preferred when a board opening comes up.

Keep a list of potential board members. Identify persons who might be potential board members and ask them if they might have interest in serving on your board at some point in the future. This is not an invitation but an attempt to determine their potential interest. Strong potential board members are often on other boards and may indicate that they would be interested when their current board involvement(s) is completed. The timing of their potential availability should be noted.

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- Be proactive in identifying candidates who will bring desired diversity to the board.
- Engage all board members in identifying (and potentially contacting) persons who should be approached.
- Contact persons on your list periodically to confirm their ongoing interest and potential future availability.
- Periodically review your list of potential candidates to determine if there are gaps in qualifications. Continue to make contacts that will round out your list. Be sure to include candidates who have the potential to serve as board officers. Some organizations have active lists of 30 to 40 or more potential board members.

Anticipate Open Positions

At least a year in advance of a potential board opening, determine what you are looking for in a prospective candidate. Review your list of prospective board members and begin to make contacts to determine their availability. Based on your desired criteria, develop a priority list of potential candidates for your anticipated board opening.

Approach a Preferred Candidate

Arrange to meet with the preferred candidate to explore potential board involvement for them. If the steps outlined above have been followed, the preferred candidate has:

- Demonstrated the desired characteristics and competencies
- Previously indicated a possible interest in serving on the board
- Indicated when they might consider an assignment based on other responsibilities

The meeting with a preferred candidate often includes at least one board member and possibly the CEO. The meeting will likely cover the following:

- The candidate's prior and current board experience.
- Experience and characteristics that she or he might bring to the board.
- Board member job description, including expectations regarding board meeting frequency, committee involvements, participation in organizational activities and financial contributions.
- Start date and length of the term.
- Opportunity for the candidate to ask questions about the organization and the board member responsibilities.
- Willingness to serve if appointed.
- Next steps, such as time frame for the candidate to let you know whether they are open to appointment and/or further review by the Governance Committee to determine whether to move forward with recommending appointment. It should be noted that only the full board (or other appointing body) can make the appointment.

Make the Appointment

If the candidate is willing to be appointed and the Governance Committee is prepared to recommend appointment, the nomination is sent to the appointing body for action. For information about how to support a successful transition to the board, see the resource *Onboarding a New Board Member*.

Related Considerations

Filling Unexpired Board Positions. Occasionally board members vacate their positions before their term is completed. Although these vacancies can arise unexpectedly, the committee should take the time needed to ensure that the person recommended to fill the position has the competencies and characteristics that the board needs over the long term.

Board Appointments by Other Boards. Sometimes the board does not appoint some or any of its members. One example is an affiliate board whose members are appointed by a corporate board. Another example is when members are appointed by another board that holds reserve powers. Even when a board does not appoint its own members, the board is encouraged to identify the characteristics that it wishes to be considered and, if possible, to identify potential candidates for appointment. The local board is often in the best position to assess the competencies it needs and to identify the best candidates.

Limited Candidate Pool. For some organizations, the potential board member candidate pool may be limited. This may be due to:

- A bylaws requirement describing the characteristics of eligible board members, i.e. being a member of a specific congregation or denomination.
- The geographic location of the organization in an area with a limited population base.
- Competition with other non-profits that are also seeking board members.

A limited candidate pool increases the importance of being proactive in your recruitment efforts.

Your feedback is welcomed. If you have questions about any of these ideas or if you have additional suggestions, please use the **Contact Us** tab on the MHS website.

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