

Fresh Approaches to Board Recruitment

Try these strategies to find new board members, attract new ideas, build diversity, and create feedback loops.

By Karen Eber Davis

When we look for new board members, we often round up the “usual suspects” – community members who are recognized, respected, and high-profile.

The results are often frustrating. And there’s a good reason for that: The usual suspects are “usual” because other nonprofits have already thought of them and added them to their boards. These busy people will either decline your invitation or, sometimes, join your board and then have little time for you and your mission.

You want – and need – to diversify your board. You recognize the value of inclusion both for the wisdom it brings and the positive impact it will have on your income and community building. How might you avoid the usual approach and succeed? Where might you look? Read on for three actionable recommendations.

1. Seek the Up-and-Coming.

Instead of stalking the usual candidates, find people who will be the top choice in a few years. That is, scout for:

- people seeking to enhance their resumes
- those who are new to town and want to get involved in the community.

Approach your CPA, banker, lawyer, and printer. Ask them about new hires in their firms and contact lists.

2. Ask for Advice.

Don’t eliminate the usual suspects. Rather, ask for their advice. See if they can point you to individuals with interest in your cause. Time your request after asking them to be your guest at a luncheon, attending their paid event, or treating them to coffee.

3. Give to Get.

Here’s a universal networking truth: To get, you must give. How can you help a collection of prospective board members with a need before you unveil your request? Ask. Listen. Offer.

“Step into other communities.”

Follow up. Intentionally, reconnect over the next three to six quarters. Repeat to grow a pool of prospects.

Bonus: Mindset Miracles

Diversity happens first inside your head. To plant the diversity seed and grow it, be curious. Step into other communities. Cross imaginary boundaries. Read on the topic.

Don’t do this alone. Enlist existing board members and staff. Urge them to be curious and attend others’ meetings and explore others’ communities.

Pick an action to begin today. 

Karen Eber Davis (karen@kedconsult.com) is an expert in maximizing philanthropic impact. She is the author of 7 Nonprofit Income Streams: Open the Floodgates to Sustainability! and Let’s Raise Nonprofit Millions Together. Sign up for her free newsletter “Added Value” at kedconsult.com.



Create a Dynamic Board

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Four Steps to Effective Networking (Vol. 30, No. 1)

Harness the Power of Termed-Out Board Members (Vol. 37, No. 4)

Leading the Transformation of Boards (Vol. 22, No. 2)

Why Feedback Is the Key to Your Success (Vol. 35, No. 3)

Look Beyond Tradition to Diversify Your Board (Vol. 22, No. 4)

Reciprocal Board Agreements: What Do Board Members Give? What Do They Receive in Return? (Vol. 28, No. 1)

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