

Cultivating Next-Gen Board Members

When diversifying your board, don't forget to include young people.

By *Emily Davis*

A mistake many nonprofit organizations make is to overlook the importance of having people with a variety of ages on the board. Age diversity can make a tremendous impact, bringing valuable perspectives to the table.

If you don't make an effort to recruit board members in their 20s and 30s, you're missing an opportunity to tap into fresh ideas, talents, and experiences. You're also missing a crucial source of donors, especially if your organization has a "give or get" policy for serving on the board.


One often cited concern is that young people don't have the necessary experience to serve on a board. If that's your worry, it's easily remedied by providing educational resources, including a comprehensive orientation, which you should be offering to all board members.

If your organization isn't comfortable bringing young people onto the board right away, encourage their participation on committees. Committee work will familiarize them with your organization and give you a chance to learn if they might be a good fit for the board at some point.

Whether you're recruiting young people for committees or board service, don't tokenize them. Avoid identifying one young person to serve in a leadership role as a representative of an entire generation. You wouldn't do that for people of color, and it's no different with younger generations.

Bringing at least two young people onto committees and the board will provide your organization with a good framework for incorporating new perspectives. Be flexible, and evaluate the process. Conduct a board self-evaluation annually, and be sure you include and listen to those young individuals on committees or the board.

Your organization may want to consider creating a "next-generation advisory board" made up wholly of young people. Some organizations call this a junior board. It's a great way to begin cultivating leadership at a young age. It will also encourage donations by solidifying the good work your organization does in young people's minds.

Identify young people who are enthusiastic about learning, service, leadership, and your organization's mission. Perhaps you can find such people among your organization's past clients and others impacted by your organization's work. By developing the skills and talents of these individuals in a leadership capacity, you're creating the potential for lifelong ambassadors and donors to your organization. 

“Age diversity can make a tremendous impact.”



“Board members in their 20s and 30s are a crucial source of donors.”

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To Learn More

Here are more resources you can use to create a dynamic, multi-generational board. These *Nonprofit World* articles are available at NonprofitWorld.org/members:

Tools for Improving Your Board's Diversity (Vol. 25, No. 5)

Who Are the Young Leaders? (Vol. 28, No. 6)

How to Assess and Improve Your Board's Performance (Vol. 24, No. 1)

To Govern Well, Create a Learning Agenda (Vol. 25, No. 4)

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

Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Board Governance (NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute).