



# Building Your Nonprofit Dream Team

*10 ways to create the board you've always wanted*

BY CAROL E. WEISMAN

**B**oard recruitment is like any other courtship; it involves flattery, ego, and a bit of anxiety. To proceed, it has to be mutually attractive to both parties.

If you're single, you want to know where other singles are hiding. Finding the perfect board member takes just as much tenacity. Here are 10 ways to find the perfect match:

**1 ESTABLISH YOUR NEEDS.** You'll need to look in different places to fill different needs. If you want to fund a \$3 million building, you need a board member with serious clout; consider Fortune 500 CEOs. If your strategy involves federal or state funding, you need a major policymaker; start with your Senator's office. If you rely on special events, find an expert in that area.

**2 START WITH PEOPLE YOU KNOW.** To be productive in the recruiting process, begin with business associates, friends, neighbors, and members of other boards with which you work.

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Such people already know something about

your organization and its goals. Also, you know them—whether they work better in a group or alone, whether you can count on them to raise funds, how much time they have available. Knowing their strengths and weaknesses starts you off with an advantage.

**3 ENLIST PEOPLE WHO SHOW INTEREST IN YOUR ORGANIZATION.** Another way to find board members is through groups who tour your site, volunteer for your events, contribute money, or otherwise support your mission. Since they have already shown an interest, they are usually excellent board members. Coming from the inside, so to speak, they take less time to become productive because they're familiar with your mission.

**4 DON'T OVERLOOK BOARD BANKS.** Board banks are the dating service of the nonprofit world. They offer specific talent when you enlarge a board. In most places, service organizations such as Junior League and United Way run board banks for nonprofits. Some professionals, such as doctors, nurses, lawyers, and accountants, offer volunteer opportunities through board banks. So do advertising and public relations firms.

**5 TARGET BUSINESSPEOPLE.** No matter what your mission, it's vital to have business acumen on your board. Watch

the local paper for business announcements, and be first with an invitation to a new executive in town. Visit corporations, and ask not only for funds but also for board members who can help you with specific needs. Some firms make community service mandatory for their executives.



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**6 DIVERSIFY.** Be sure your board is diverse in terms of age, gender, religion, race, and ethnic background. Note that diversity means different things to different boards. For a Catholic charity, it might mean representation from Irish, Italian, and German Catholic communities. For a Jewish agency, it might mean representation from Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform congregations.

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**7 MAKE THE INTERVIEW COMFORTABLE.** When interviewing potential board members, match them with someone with similar interests. If you want to bring businesspeople on board, interview them along with several other businesspeople. Let the person you're recruiting choose the time and place for this interview. Do whatever will make your prospective board member most comfortable.

**8 ORIENT THEM.** Once you've recruited board members, don't think the courtship is over. Not at all. To build the board of your dreams, you need to give new board members the tools they need. This means putting time and thought into an outstanding orientation program.

Your approach to orientation will depend on whether you have an on-going admission policy or bring board members in all at once. Both methods are effective. The advantage of bringing everyone in simultaneously is that you can orient them together and on a larger scale. This method also takes less staff time.

The advantage of bringing people on board one at a

time is that you can individualize the orientation process. This way, the new accountant receives a financial orientation, the social worker reviews programming, and the marketing manager learns ways to "sell" the organization to the public.

**9 ESTABLISH A MENTORING PROGRAM.** Match each new recruit to a long-time board member, who will act as mentor. Ask mentors to drive new members to their first meeting. They can do a lot of educating about the organization in the car. They can explain who the players are and how decisions are made. At the meeting, mentors can introduce new members to the rest of the board. On the ride home after the meeting, they can answer any questions the new board members may have.

**10 MAKE THEM FEEL WANTED.** This is the art of board building. Continue the process you began with your orientation and mentoring programs. Don't neglect to give time and thanks to long-time as well as new members. Every board member needs to feel wanted, needed, and appreciated.

Remember, each board member has a tremendous amount to offer your organization in terms of skills, talent, and resources—but also a tremendous amount to gain. Not only do you offer recognition, status, contacts, and power, you provide the opportunity to do good for a cause you both value. ■

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- \*Starred publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center. For more information, see the *Resource Center Catalog* or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (800-424-7367).

