



I've Been Thinking about... Board Recruitment

Are you giving this important governance step the attention it deserves?
What does it take to build the board you need and want?

By Martha Golensky

Recently, I was elected to a local nonprofit board. I was delighted to find an organization whose mission I could enthusiastically support and whose approach to recruitment was so inclusive and transparent. What was it that made this board's recruitment process stand out?

A Well-Thought-Out Recruitment Process

It was immediately clear that these board members didn't view filling a board vacancy as an afterthought. They placed a notice in their widely distributed newsletter asking interested individuals to come forward. I e-mailed the executive director and received a prompt reply. She invited me to meet with her, the board president, and the nominating committee chair over lunch, where they probed my qualifications and gave me a chance to question them. Next, I received a packet of information, including expectations for board members and a form to complete for consideration by the nominating committee. Following their deliberations and approval by the full board, they sent me a formal invitation. Here's what stands out about this nonprofit's recruitment process:

- **The nominating committee is a standing committee**, not a few trustees hastily appointed when it's time to choose new board members.

- **Instead of the "buddy system"** of recruitment—the practice of picking friends, colleagues, or

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neighbors of current board members with little regard for whether they'll bring useful talents or why they want to join the board—this board gave great thought to the type of person who could help further the organization's work and would be a good fit with those already on the board.

- **They didn't play games.** Once they ascertained my interest and saw my qualifications, they moved steadily and deliberately on my candidacy.

First Steps

If you're ready to strengthen your approach to board recruitment, first identify the board's current makeup on every dimension vital to realizing your mission: geographic representation, age, occupation, and areas of expertise. It helps to use a grid to plot these elements; the gaps quickly become apparent.

Keep in mind you need a mix of people, some who bring *wisdom*, or knowledge of the organization's programs and services; some, *wealth*, through their own resources or obtaining funds from others, or both; and some, *work*, the time, energy, and ability to carry out governance responsibilities. Today I would add *wallop*, for the connections and influence with external stakeholders that can pay huge dividends.

The most important step is to

establish a standing, year-round board development committee. Having such a committee gives you time to seek out prospects in order to present a strong slate for the annual election. Once the word gets out that serving on your board isn't a shoo-in, you may find yourself in the enviable position of having a pool of desirable candidates from which to choose.

Research shows that an effective board has direct bearing on organizational effectiveness. It seems obvious, then, that building the best possible board ought to be a very high priority. ■

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More on Recruitment (www.snpo.org/members)

- **Defining Your Board's Needs** (Vol. 26, No. 1)
- **Reciprocal Board Agreements: What Do Board Members Give? What Do They Receive in Return?** (Vol. 28, No. 1)
- **Can Standing Committees Contribute to High-Impact Governing?** (Vol. 25, No. 2)

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