



Keeping Board Members Who Serve, Not Sit

Be sure your board makes an impact.

By Peter Gamache & Jackie Sue Griffin

The aim of board recruitment isn't simply to fill seats but to fill gaps in your organization's needs by choosing the right people. Here are ways to be sure your people will be active and impactful, "serving" versus "sitting" on your board.

Tips for Recruiting Great Board Members

Be open about what's expected financially. Let board prospects know what they'll be asked to give and raise from others. State plainly what you expect them to contribute financially and why. If you're not clear, you may lose your candidate to another board that is.

Put your board members on your website. Show your board members to the candidates and friends of your organization. These are the great people who make your work possible. Including them on your website sends a message about how much you value them. It's also an excellent marketing opportunity.

Make it easy for your members to get to meetings. Set a consistent meeting place and time that's convenient for them. Make sure you meet at least four times a year.

When a board prospect contacts you, answer as quickly as if it were a major donor getting in touch. Be very

“Let board prospects know exactly what you expect of them.”

responsive when you're negotiating with potential board members. Donors give money, but board members give you their finances, time, expertise, and connections. Your prompt response and attention signals their value to your organization.

Make it clear that there are many ways for board members to engage besides fundraising: exciting projects you've worked on recently, stretch goals you're planning, challenges your organization will need to navigate. Potential board members want to share their ideas, not just their money. Stress how valuable your board's contributions have been, the impact their work has, and how much you and your organization appreciate it.

Tips for Retaining Your Board Members

Once you have exemplary board members, here's how you can lower board turnover and retain your most effective members:

Evaluate every meeting. You can either discuss board meetings in executive sessions or conduct a survey. Ask board members at each meeting questions such as these:

- *How could the meeting* have gone better?
- *What could board members* have done better?

Then, address these dissatisfactions.

Every year, assess board members' satisfaction level. Check that each one wants to continue on the board. Use surveys similar to “stay surveys” for employees, in which you ask people the reasons they like their job.

Make certain that you have the essential tools for effective governance – board policy, strategy, and key metrics. If you don't have them now, present your plan to the board.

Be sure your chair is responsible for all of the above. These aren't tasks for the chief executive. 

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