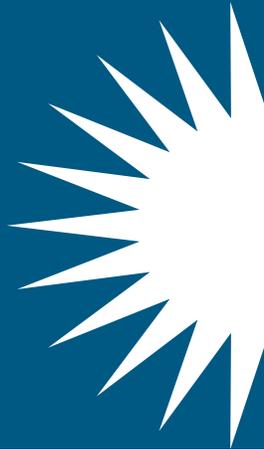


# Successful Non-Profit Board Recruiting



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A strong board generally leads to a sound and well-run organization. Building a strong board requires an active recruitment process. There are certain principles of board recruiting that will help ensure your board continues to get stronger, and therefore better equipped to meet your organization's mission.

## **Principle 1: Year-round recruiting**

Boards need to be thinking about recruitment of new board members year-round, not just in the month leading up to the annual meeting where new members are approved. Good companies hire in anticipation of growth and attrition, and good boards need to be following these same practices. Year-round board recruitment will help ensure that you find and vet the right candidates that fit the desired profile, rather than the candidates who happen to come along at the right time.

Speaking of the right candidates, that brings us to our next principle...

## **Principle 2: Strategic recruiting**

A board, like any strong organization, should be properly diversified. As such, when thinking about board recruiting, you should be finding ways to diversify the existing board. I'm not talking about diversification from an ethnic/racial/religious/age/gender perspective, although that is certainly valuable and important – I'm talking about diversification from an impact perspective. Board members are expected to be ambassadors of the organization to the population at large. Therefore, you need board member diversity based on geography, center of influence, and profession. Think about it – if many of your board members live in the same geographic area, work in the same profession, or belong to the same country club, they're all going to be interacting with the same group of potential supporters, so the organization's influence cannot grow. When you expand the board, you should seek to gain exposure to new board members that live and work in areas that are underrepresented on your current board and who will have a sphere of influence that will extend outside the organization's current reach.

In addition to expanding your ambassadorial reach, new board members ideally will bring some sort of skill set to the table that is not currently featured. In a perfect world, your board will consist of individuals who can provide expertise in a variety of fields, from law and accounting to event planning, fundraising, education, and more.

I know what you're thinking – there aren't exactly throngs of people knocking down the door to join my board. Cast a wide net when looking for new board members. Use your network by soliciting recommendations from your professional partners – the attorneys, accountants, and advisors that service the organization –

as well as friends and neighbors. Finally, refer back to principle one. Year-round recruitment will help with this issue – it will provide sufficient time to find the candidates who can diversify and strengthen the board.

### **Principle 3: Honest recruiting**

I'm going to make it even harder on you. In addition to recruiting year-round and being selective when it comes to identifying new board candidates, you must be unabashedly honest with regard to the expectations and requirements of board members. Being up front about the number of meetings, time commitment, expected financial support, and committee participation is crucial to recruiting strong board members. If you understate the amount of time and energy that is required to be a board member, you will inevitably recruit members that a) are bitter about having more of their time/energy/resources used up than they expected, b) are unwilling to meet the requirements, or c) both. If you are up front about the level of commitment that is expected and required from board members, you will recruit new board members that are willing to meet those expectations.

Defined term limits help when it comes to this principle. If a board candidate is told that the time and effort associated with board membership is extensive but is also told that the term is only three years, he or she may be willing to make that commitment. If the time and effort required is extensive, and the candidate thinks he or she may be sucked in to the organization for the rest of his or her life, the answer will most likely be no. Expecting a lot out of board members, but only for a reasonable length of time, is key.

### **Principle 4: Considerate recruiting**

Think about how intimidating it is to be the new kid in school. You have no one to sit with at lunch, no awareness of who's who in the social hierarchy, and may not even know how to access your locker. Try to avoid putting new board members in that awkward "new kid" position by having processes in place that make them feel welcome and comfortable. Make it easy for new board members to join the fold.

A strong orientation program is the most important part of this process. Provide significant training for new board members by having them interact with key staff members, filling them in on the history of the organization and the board, discussing board member expectations (which were hopefully clearly established during the recruiting process!), and explaining what near-term challenges the board may be facing. Provide them with all the background information they will need, so when they step into that first board meeting they feel that they have a strong foundation of knowledge and can contribute from day one. This will, of course, include arming new board members with both the mission statement of the organization, as well as the written strategic plan.

In the interest of providing a welcoming and comfortable environment, you may want to assign a mentor for new board members. This mentor can take the newbie under his or her wing and be a friendly face, a resource, and a sounding board for the seemingly stupid questions that new board members may have on their minds but may not be willing to ask in front of the entire group. The mentor can help provide a lifeline for the first year of board membership, until the new board member gets his or her footing. This will create a smooth and swift transition from new board recruit to contributing board member.

By adhering to these four recruiting principles, you will introduce board members that will expand your organization's sphere of influence, bring necessary skills and expertise to the table, have a solid understanding of expectations and a willingness to meet those expectations, and be integral and contributing members of the board from day one.

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