

# Boardroom Bearings

Navigating to Board Excellence



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## Board Development Step 3: RECRUIT

In this issue, we turn our attention to RECRUITING board members. Remember, board development activities are continuous, not just the month before board elections. Wherever you are in the annual cycle of board membership, you can do something to upgrade your organization's practices.

### Preparation

Before recruiting anyone, the Governance Committee should examine the current board to see how many vacancies need to be filled at the next election.



Vacancies occur because board members have reached the end of a term, reached a term limit, or because they do not wish to continue on the board. (Term limits should be specified in the bylaws).

Next, the Governance Committee should evaluate all current board members who are eligible for re-election.

#### Re-election should not be automatic!

The evaluation should be both in terms of a) what the board/organization needs and b) the person's past performance.

- a) Organizational needs change and the board composition needs to change, too. For example, if an organization is undertaking a major marketing initiative, a new board member with that expertise may be needed. To make space for that new expertise, a current board member may not be re-nominated.
- b) And if a person's past performance has been inadequate, obviously they should not be asked to continue serving on the board.

In both cases, the Chair of the Governance Committee needs to have diplomatic, individual conversations with the people in question so they understand why they are not being re-nominated.

### Recruiting

Once the number of vacancies is known, the Governance Committee begins recruiting candidates. The dividing line is fuzzy, however, between cultivating a relationship with a prospective board member and recruiting them to serve. The important thing is that the

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Governance Committee gradually acquires more and more knowledge about prospects. This knowledge is gained through one or more conversations that may be thought of as interviews. Much like hiring or being hired for a job, both parties want to be sure there is a good fit.



**CAUTION:** Ideally, the Governance Committee will be looking at a pool of prospects that is larger than the number of vacancies. The interviewer, therefore, must be careful NOT to imply that the prospect has already been selected to stand for election. The Governance Committee still needs to weigh all the information and make the final selection.

### Good Topics to Discuss in these Interviews

- The organization's mission, services, and strategic direction.
- How the prospect feels about the organization, its work, and reputation.
- How the prospect has been involved in the past (volunteer, donor, etc.).
- The responsibilities of the board.
- Board member job description and expectations of board members (time, participation on a committee, fund raising, etc.) as well as any specific expectations for a particular prospect (such as marketing expertise).
- Frequency and length of board meetings, including the board schedule.
- Why the person may be invited to stand for election (why your organization is interested in them).
- The person's reasons for wanting to join your board.
- Whether the prospect has significant work, volunteer, or personal commitments that may prevent full engagement with the board. It is better to discover problems before nominating the person. After the election it's too late.
- Whether the person would serve if nominated and elected.

### Red Flags

The interviewing process described above may seem excessive. But when you invest in getting to know each prospect, you can identify red flags and choose not to nominate someone who is likely to be a drag on your organization's goals and mission. Examples of red flags include:

- People who "know it all." They may be dogmatic, opinionated, or stubborn and fail to respect the views of other board members.
- Lone wolves. They may stand in the way of consensus building.
- Someone with a personal agenda to change something in the organization. They may alienate others.
- Status-seekers who are prominent in the community or want to enhance their resume. They may expect to be deferred to.



### Nominations and Elections

With information collected on potential candidates and knowledge of what the board and organization need, the Governance Committee builds the slate. Many organizations use a "single slate" meaning that only one person is nominated for each vacancy. Others use a "multiple slate" meaning that two or more people are nominated for each vacancy.



Organizations vary greatly in how they handle elections; hopefully the nomination and election procedures are spelled out in the bylaws. In most membership organizations, the members vote on the slate of candidates; in many social service organizations, the board is self-perpetuating, meaning that the current board members vote.

In either case, and before the election, the Governance Committee distributes information about the candidates on the slate. Prior to the election, and in a session where nominees are not present, boards should have an opportunity to freely raise questions about a nominee or share relevant information. Board members who are up for re-election should not be present during such discussions. Finally, it's a good policy for all voting to be done by written ballot and for the election results to be recorded in the minutes.

## Following the Election

As soon as new board members are elected, the board chair should contact each winner and welcome them to board service. And in the case of a multiple slate, contact each loser and thank them for their willingness to stand for election. A phone call is fine, but many boards also send a formal letter of welcome that includes the board member job description and the date and place of the board orientation. Some boards even ask new members to sign a formal agreement that specifies mutual expectations.



## Question of the Month

### Q: What is a consent agenda?

**A:** According to David Renz, Ph.D., professor of public policy and the director of the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership at the Henry W. Bloch School of Management at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, "A consent agenda is a practice by which the mundane and non-controversial board action items are organized apart from the rest of the agenda and approved as a group. ... Consent agendas are used to save board meeting time and to help ensure that board meetings focus on substantive topics that are worth discussion. Through the 'bundling' process, the entire set of items of business that are not worth board meeting time can be voted on in one action versus taking the time to vote on each individual item."

Read more [here](#).

## New Infographic

The University of San Francisco recently released a new infographic on the power and scope of the nonprofit sector. It would be useful in board training or orientation sessions because most board members are not very aware of the scope of the sector in which your organization operates.

[The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector](#)

## The Great Debate: Is Fundraising a Board Responsibility?

At the BoardSource Leadership Forum, held in November in Los Angeles, one of the plenary sessions was a debate on the question, "Is fundraising a board responsibility?" The 36-minute video is fifth on [this page](#).

## Re-cap

Since choosing board members has powerful implications for the future effectiveness of the

board and the success of the organization, we are running a 9-part series on building an effective board of directors. The first article in the series discussed how to IDENTIFY potential board members; the second discussed how to CULTIVATE them. [Previous newsletters may be accessed here.](#)

Here is a place to find [information on recruiting board members.](#)

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