

# STEPS TO EFFECTIVE BOARD DEVELOPMENT

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## Step 1. Assess current board members

The Board Development or Governance Committee (formerly known as the Nominating Committee) must conduct an assessment of the current board. The committee looks at the types of skills needed and requisite demographic characteristics. Most important is to think about what will add strength, stature and balance to the board. Assess your board development composition needs by key criteria:

- A. Review the strategic plan to ascertain future needs. For example, if the strategic plan includes a goal to increase public awareness, do you have sufficient expertise and experience in marketing and public relations?
- B. Review operational and fundraising needs. These include skills in finance, law, human resources, strategic planning as well as fund raising.
- C. Determine desirable composition, including age, gender, and ethnic and cultural background. It is extremely important to have good diversity among all these demographic characteristics. The more diverse the group, the better the discussions and the decision making process.
- D. Most desirable board size. If your bylaws stipulate a number range for members of the Board, determine what you currently need in terms of numbers right now. Having 3 roll off does not automatically mean you must have 3 coming on the board.
  - Interview current board members scheduled to rotate off to determine ongoing interest in a new term;
  - Review the number of members desired;
  - Determine number of new board members needed.
- E. Use a recruitment grid (see Attachment #1) to illustrate current composition and areas of need. Fill in the names of existing/continuing board members along the top and ask them to provide information needed to determine what they bring to the board. This will provide the committee with concrete information about the types of board members needed to build a strong board for the future.

## Step 2. Identify, cultivate, and recruit potential board members.

While the Board Development committee is assessing board needs, *all members* of the Board should be working to identify, cultivate and recruit potential board members. Some places to look for prospective potential board members include:

- Persons whose current terms are ending
- Referrals from other board members and agency volunteers
- Staff
- Board and staff of other agencies

- United Way
- Individuals you meet at community affairs
- Organizations interested in community service
- Ethnic leaders
- Business and government leaders
- Professional groups
- Records of previous board development nominating process
- Religious leaders
- Friends, colleagues and associates
- Donors

Consider asking every board member to nominate at least one person each year. Board members do not need to be concerned with what the current recruitment needs are; rather, they should nominate individuals who they believe would make good board members. The Board Development Committee will then have a sufficient pool of candidates to review and find individuals who have the needed characteristics for each specific year.

**Nominating Process:**

- A. Nominating or Referral Form – Board members must have some way to collect basic contact information from the nominees. See Attachment #2 for an example.
- B. Board Application – the committee can ask potential nominees to complete an application form that will provide the information needed to compare with the recruitment grid. See Attachment #3 for an example. Resumes can also be attached.

**Step 3: Interview and Recommend**

Once a pool of nomination forms/applications have been received, the Board Development Committee reviews the applicants against the recruitment grid and selects those individuals the committee believes will best meet the agency’s needs. It always a good idea to select more nominees to interview than what is needed. Selected committee members, along the Executive Director, should then personally interview those nominees the group are most interested in. Interviews can be held with more than one person at a time. During the interview:

1. Clearly express expectations – Provide potential board members the essential information about the organization, the board and board member responsibilities.
2. Be prepared for what prospects ask:
  - A. Why are you interested in me as a board member?
  - B. What role do you see me playing on your board?
  - C. What is unique about your organization?
  - D. What will my responsibilities as a board member be?
  - E. What will I need to know to be an efficient, effective member?
  - F. Will I receive appropriate training?

- G. How much time will I need to assume my responsibilities as a member (planning, committee assignments, attendance at meetings, special events, special meetings, other events)
- H. What are my personal financial obligations?
- I. Am I expected to participate in fund raising?
- J. Have community needs been assessed?
- K. Are Board members indemnified or covered by liability insurance?
- L. What are the agency's immediate future goals?

3. In the interview:

- State your needs openly and do not minimize such critical items as time commitment
- Present benefits of involvement as a volunteer. Emphasize what's in it for them.
- Ask about previous volunteer or board work.
- Deal honestly with objections by hearing them out and responding with options
- Be sure to have some printed material to leave with each person.
- Arrange for any specific follow-up.
- Make no promises! An interview should not necessarily mean approval for membership.

4. Follow-up:

Once interviews have been completed, the Board Development committee reconvenes to discuss interview outcomes and selects the individuals the committee believes best meets the board vacancy needs and will work best with the overall board. The names of these individuals are then submitted to the full board as the committee's recommendations.

Please note – it is important that no communication is made with potential board members until the board votes. For those individuals who were interviewed but were not selected, a member of the Board Development Committee must contact them personally to let them know and to encourage them to become involved with the agency in some other way until next year when they will once again be considered (along with others). Once new board members have been selected, it is time to conduct orientation for those members who are selected.

**Step 4: Orient and train new board members.**

Remember that board orientation starts in the initial interview. Once board members have been selected, a detailed training and orientation is critical. How else can you expect new board members to make thoughtful, careful decisions unless they have the foundation of knowledge they need? There are several ways to conduct this orientation:

1. Immediately after his or her selection, new Board members should receive a call from the Board chair to welcome them and offer any support and assistance.

2. Set up a regular orientation training session that gives a thorough introduction to the programs of the agency as well as the board work (i.e. strategic plan, financial statements, budget, etc.).
3. Consider asking an experienced board member to act as sponsor or mentor for each new board member so they have someone they know from the onset.
4. Arrange an informal occasion where full board can meet new members and begin to develop key relationships.
5. Give all new members a packet of materials in a board manual. See Attachment #5 as an example.

