



Rev Up Your Board by Recruiting Strategically

Is your board of directors sputtering along on empty?

As nonprofits become more complex and the communities they serve more diverse, their boards may very well need an octane boost. Instead of the traditional “draw-on-friends-and-colleagues” model, boards will need to become more systematic and deliberate about recruiting (and retaining) a high-performance board. Here’s how:

Aim High, Recruit Strategically

First and foremost, don’t erode your goals by believing that you are “lucky to get anyone at all.” Instead of reflexively filling a vacancy, take the time to recruit board members who affirm and demonstrate the following:

- A sincere dedication to the values, mission and vision of the organization.
- Personal integrity, honesty and courtesy.
- The ability to express individual opinions and perspectives (including asking difficult questions) balanced with the need to support group decisions.
- Being comfortable with diversity.

Recruit Skill Sets, Not Personalities

At the very least, your board will need members with the following skills:

- Financial expertise

- Investment experience
- Fundraising credentials
- Legal expertise
- Property and facility management and construction background
- Marketing talent
- Not-for-profit management and governance experience
- Skills specifically related to your organization's mission and programs

Recruit for Diversity

As baby boomers move toward retirement and white Americans become a minority in many communities, board diversity is becoming increasingly important. Take some strategic, proactive steps to foster diversity, including:

- Informing board members and staff of the value of diversity.
- Developing written materials that define clear goals and objectives related to increasing the diversity of your staff and board.
- Recruiting decision makers who operate outside of the organization's economic and social circles.

Recruit for Youth

Recruiting for diversity may include scouting the college and early-career set, many of whom are on fire to serve, seeing volunteering as a way to develop skills and improve job opportunities. To attract youth, offer the things that seem to matter most to this age group:

- Flexible, relevant, authentic and hands-on volunteer opportunities.
- Action-oriented participation that leads to tangible outcomes.
- A chance to learn new skills, develop leadership abilities and experience personal growth.

Some Fresh Recruiting Ideas

Take a dip in your volunteer pool. Ask your executive director or volunteer coordinator for the names of several of your organization's top volunteers, donors and clients.

Hands-on folks like these bring both demonstrated commitment and an intimate knowledge of the organization's strengths and weaknesses.

Mine your "No's." Draw up a list of 20 or so well-connected people you want on the board but you suspect won't be able to join. Call and invite them to a "one-meeting committee" (lunch is a good incentive). Tell them they'll be told more about the organization and what it's looking for in board members. At the end of lunch they'll be asked simply for the name of one person they think would be a good board member.

Swap with another organization. Approach several local organizations you don't traditionally have ties with. Over lunch with the board president or executive director, propose that your two organizations recommend "retiring" board members to each other as a way of establishing organizational links and strengthening ties among communities.

With extensive experience working with nonprofits like yours, our professionals can help. Talk to us about fresh ideas for structuring the appropriate committees and developing the processes to rev up your board.