

Ten Ways to Build Your Board

The Board is the most valuable asset of any nonprofit organization, bringing professional expertise, personal credibility, contacts, and financial support. If you're an executive director, development professional, or serve on a board, you know that attracting and recruiting skilled leadership is not easy. Here are 10 suggestions to systematically and thoughtfully build your board:

1. **Analyze your current board** for its demographic composition, skill sets, and giving capacity.
2. **Identify needed skill sets** that would enhance the composition of your board, such as legal knowledge, financial knowledge, fundraising skill (ability/willingness to ask others to give), facilities experience (Do you have a large construction project coming up?), local connections, etc.
3. **Create job descriptions** outlining the ideal skill sets to fill the gaps and ask current board members, donors and volunteers to recommend persons who would fit the bill.
4. **Invite** current board members to introduce three new people to the executive director this year. In these meetings, share the job descriptions and ask for recommendations.
5. **Host a listening event** and invite potential board members to share their ideas and perspectives on your organization, the need in the community, and how that need can be adequately addressed. You may be surprised by what you learn. And participants in this event may find themselves passionately connecting with your mission – making them far more likely to say yes to an invitation to serve on the board if you decide to ask them.
6. **Refresh your board agendas.** Do board members speak at meetings? How engaged are they? How much do they really know about your organization, its mission and importance to the community? Board meetings should provide ample information and invite real involvement from board members. Their true participation will ignite their interest and desire to tell others of their positive experience.
7. **Hold an orientation**, including new and seasoned board members. Don't assume they won't be interested. Most board members take their responsibility seriously and often feel significantly unprepared to serve competently.
8. **Develop a tool kit** for board members. Include messages that have successfully engaged people with the organization, useful information about the services your nonprofit provides to meet community needs, and stories that others can tell to interest their friends and peers in the work of the organization.

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9. **Hold a training** in which board members can learn about and practice the skills that you would most like them to use to benefit your organization. Many board members are reluctant to work the room during special events and to participate in gift discussions. Yet these are two of the most valuable tasks they can engage in for you. Practice is, by far, the best way to overcome their reluctance.

10. **Ask board members to share** their particular knowledge and skills with others on the board. By doing so, they will bond with and learn from each other, feeling that they continue to receive value from their affiliation with your organization, in addition to giving value to it.

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