

NONPROFIT

Purposefully Deploy Board Development

Every good nonprofit board should invest time in board development. In simple terms, the board development team becomes the sales arm of the organization and the key to creating and maintaining a strong group of motivated and dedicated individuals. It also ensures that you won't have board burnout – a common challenge for many volunteer organizations.

The Committee. Board development is best accomplished with the formation of a board development committee (BDC) composed of the more seasoned members of a board. The BDC is responsible for recruiting new board members, helping develop better board members and motivating the board.

It takes strong sales, networking skills and credibility with the organization to be effective in this role. The current president and executive director are good anchor members of this committee.

For new boards, the question is, "Where do we begin?" For older boards, the question is, "How do we breathe new life into this board?" Putting the right process and programs in place addresses both of these important questions.

The Tool Kit. Getting started requires some basic tools. Once the committee is formed, the initial tasks include formalizing the board recruitment and initiation process.



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Showing a good face to the outside world is crucial and good candidates are impressed with a good process and materials. The BD process includes:

- Developing an information kit for prospective members,
- Mapping the composition of the board,
- Developing a "long list" of prospects and
- Designing a board development binder.

The information kit includes background materials that often need to be developed or assembled for the first time:

- Organizational overview,
- Biographical information of board members – bios are a great

starting point, providing a real flavor for the personality of the board,

- Responsibilities and terms,
- Bylaws and governance,
- Standing committee descriptions,
- Activity highlights,
- Financials and
- Agendas/minutes.

Recruitment. Recruiting can begin anytime while the board binder is in process. There are different ways to recruit.

One proven process is for all referrals of new board candidates to go to the BDC. The committee also has its own list and does most of the heavy lifting in identifying new candidates.

The list should take into account the current profile of the board and where there are gaps in terms of talent and a good representation of the community or the organization's membership.

Achieving the right mix of board members is often challenging and may require research to find out how the board can attract the candidates needed to balance the board. It may also be worthwhile to consider junior board members who can be mentored and make non-financial contributions.

Once candidates are identified, a personal call or note goes out to them to ascertain their interest and to obtain their bios for review by the BDC. Over coffee, the committee conducts the interview.

Each member discusses a different aspect of board involvement – fundraising, organizational accomplishments and committee initiatives. The candidate is asked to discuss how he/she would like to contribute. The group takes a vote on the candidate who is then introduced for a vote at the next board meeting.

Alternatively, the board can hold a recruitment event. The BDC develops a broad list of potential board and/or committee candidates and sends each an invitation that indicates that they have been recommended for this board.

Part of the event would be structured as an information session to educate invitees about the organization and the role of the board. The agenda may include presentations by BDC members and vignettes of those who are helped by the organization.

The remaining time would be for informal conversation with board and key staff members. At the end of the event, attendees would be asked to fill out a card indicating their level of interest now or in the future.

Development. So, you've welcomed new board members and encouraged them to participate at all levels. What about the board members who have been involved for awhile?

Standing and ad hoc committees are a key way to encourage participation. Rotations should also be enforced appropriately.

The board development process

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and terms for rotation are all spelled out in the BD binder. If a board member has reached tenure, then it is appropriate to send a letter requesting formal interest in renewing participation or resigning if appropriate. This provides a gracious "out" for some.

On the other hand, members who are committed to the cause and want to remain may need to be addressed in another way. Since everyone is motivated differently, the board development chair might take on a board survey to better understand the collective and individual needs of board members in order to ensure everyone's involvement. The interviews are summarized in a report and shared with the entire board in the appropriate setting of a special meeting.

Goals and Objectives. The best boards achieve a balance between the strategic and the tactical. Because board members come from such diverse backgrounds, it is important to find a way to align the board around key big-picture goals, but

also find ways to accomplish tasks in the short-term.

As boards begin to mature, this can be accomplished with an annual strategy retreat and followed up by tasking the committees and board president to review the retreat outcomes at regular board meetings. The retreat should be held off-site and include the entire board and key staff members.

Accomplishments. The board's accomplishments are a tribute to the organization and they should be recognized and celebrated. This can be done by announcing board appointments, key board activities, creating an annual recognition event for board and staff, or by simply holding a holiday party for volunteers.

Camaraderie is a major component of board motivation. Whereas the board is often a reflection of the membership of the organization, the board development committee has a strong leadership component and so it should be seen as a privilege to be part of this highly charged engine that drives the growth and success of the board.

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