

Developing a Board That's On Board

One of the most important aspects of Board operations is Board staffing. Just like the careful staffing that is usually done with employees, **Board members should be carefully selected, trained and evaluated, as well.** Board members and other leaders must appreciate the strong value that Board members can bring, rather than tolerating Boards as if they are some necessary evil to be avoided at all costs. Leaders should not approach recruitment and selection as if they are somehow lucky just to get Board members who will show up at Board meetings. **Leaders must act as if they deserve a very dedicated and participative Board – that attitude alone can make a huge difference in achieving highly effective Boards.** The philosophy for staffing the Board depends on the Board model that the nonprofit prefers. For example, a policy governing Board might prefer members who have strong Board experience. In a collective, the nonprofit also would prefer members who were comfortable working as equals with members of the staff. Nonprofits often use a mix of the following approaches.

Functional approach

Boards staffed primarily with members who have the skills and knowledge to address current strategic priorities, for example, Boards, planning, programs, staffing, finances and fundraising. This approach is useful when starting a nonprofit because Board members can help build the various management functions. It also is useful to ensure strong governance of the various management functions on an ongoing basis. The number of Board members that you might have depends on the types of skills that you need on your Board, which, in turn, depends on the range and complexity of issues or goals to be faced by the nonprofit.

Diversification approach

Boards staffed primarily with members that represent a variety of different cultures, values, opinions and perspectives. This approach is useful to ensure that Board planning, deliberations, decisions and policies truly consider many different perspectives and that they

do not forget about, or discriminate against, certain groups of people. The number of Board members to have on your Board depends on the range of diversity that you want to involve.

Representative approach

Boards staffed primarily with members who represent the major constituents of the organization, for example, members from different regions or groups of clients. This approach is useful to ensure that specific constituents, for example, subchapters of a national organization, always have strong input to the Board's planning, deliberations, decisions and policies. The number of Board members to have on your Board depends on the number of different constituents that you want represented.

Passion approach

Boards staffed primarily with people who have a strong passion for the mission of the organization. Too often, that approach only makes for passionate meetings, not for passionate results. Passion alone is not enough – Board members also must have the time and energy to actively participate in the Board. Often, nonprofits use a mix of these approaches, for example, the functional approach to ensure that governance has strong oversight of management activities, and diversification and representative approaches to ensure that all important perspectives and constituents are represented on the Board.

Adapted from “Field Guide to Developing, Operating and Restoring Your Nonprofit Board”

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