

Nominating Procedures

by Debora Ott

A strong board is vital to any organization's stability and longevity. The board attracts resources and people to the organization, ensures that policies, programs and procedures flow from the organization's mission, hires the executive director and spreads the mission of the organization among widely diverse groups of people. The Nominating Committee may be the most important committee of the board because it is charged with soliciting and recruiting new board members who are ready and able to share their time, energy, connections, resources and talents with the organization.

The Solicitation Process

Before soliciting new board members, determine the skills and talents that already exist on your board. Consider what additional skills and talents are needed for your board to represent or mirror the community and constituencies that your organization serves. This gap analysis will help you determine what kind of board members to look for. "Community" may be defined geographically by city, county, state, region or country, by discipline, or by a combination of any of these. Identify specific profiles that are missing from your board such as attorney, accountant, urban dweller, Asian American (fe)male, writer, Latino youth, retired business (wo)man, etc., based on your mission and the communities your organization serves.

When soliciting new board members, look for people who are accomplished in their field or chosen profession. Try to solicit energetic individuals who are good communicators and make sure they have a sense of humor. The work will be rendered tedious without this trait. It's important to remember that board members need to get something from the organization in exchange for giving of themselves. Whatever that satisfaction or connection might be, it should be considered when identifying candidates and exploring their role on the board.

Recruitment of Board Candidates

The recruitment of board candidates should be carried out under the direction and coordination of the Nominating Committee, though other board members may participate in the process as requested. Please note that it's best to tell potential candidates that your board is creating a pool of interested individuals that it may draw from in the future. This way potential candidates will not anticipate election to the board immediately and suffer the resulting disappointment if the board decides to elect someone else. After likely candidates have been identified, the following simple process

is best for board recruitment.

1. Call the potential candidates to determine if they are interested in learning more about your organization and possibly serving on your board. This can be done by a representative of the Nominating Committee or by a board member who knows the potential candidate well. Be sure to share how often the board meets, when and where it meets, and the approximate hours of service expected each month.
2. Set up a meeting with interested individuals and mail pertinent information about your organization to them in advance of the meetings. Items mailed might include promotional material, a current board list, newspaper clippings, an organizational fact sheet, a list of your funders, etc. This packet should be accompanied by a letter thanking them for their interest and confirming the time and place of the meeting. At the meeting, describe your organization, detail board expectations (time, money and talent) and committees, and answer any questions they might have about the organization. Reiterate that you are soliciting interested individuals for a pool of potential candidates the board might choose from in the future, and ask them when and if they would be interested in serving on the board at some time. If they say yes, ask them to send a resume or biographical statement to share with the board.
3. After reviewing the interest level and credentials of potential candidates, the Nominating Committee makes recommendations to the executive committee and then, with the officers' approval, to the full board. Although election to the board of an organization usually follows this procedure, occasionally an organization will conduct a phone vote and then ratify board members' election by a show of hands at the next regularly scheduled meeting.
4. After the election, a board packet containing the organization's mission, by-laws, incorporation papers, recent board minutes, annual budget and most recently completed audited financial statement (or year-end financial statement) should be sent to the new board member. An officer of the board or the chair of the Nominating Committee should call the newly elected board members to congratulate them and to let them know that someone else from the board will be in touch with them to conduct a mini-interview for the purpose of introducing them to the board at their first meeting.
5. The mini-interview has several objectives: 1) A board introduction can be based on pertinent information about the new board member; 2) The new board member is given an opportunity to share personal and professional dimensions of his or her story; 3) Both individuals have a chance to spend time together as peers and bond; 4) The circle of individuals known to the new board member is widened through the process; 5) The full board gets a chance to appreciate the range of experiences and talents of the new board member that would otherwise

not surface during a regular board meeting.

To ensure a relaxed environment for the mini-interview, arrange to conduct it in a social setting such as a café or restaurant rather than a business setting. This will help keep the conversation informal and flowing. If at all possible, the interview should be conducted by someone on the board who has not yet met the new board member. This adds to the new board member's direct knowledge of who's on the board and gives the existing board member a chance to invest in the new board member's success through his or her welcome.

6. New board members should have an orientation prior to their actual service if possible. This can be done prior to a board retreat or board meeting to make it more convenient for them.