

# Board Composition and Recruitment

Recruiting your Board | Serve on a Nonprofit Board

Board members often have long tenures, and your board has tremendous responsibility and decision-making power. As such, it's critical to the success of your organization to have the right composition of board leaders. Which candidate skills and characteristics could your board benefit from as it navigates your organization's challenges in the next three to five years? Consider your ideal mix of professional skills, resources, backgrounds and experience, demographics, and community connections.

Before recruiting, determine the skills and expertise on your current board and what's missing. Download a strategic board composition matrix to map your current board to help you get started.

Considering needs before recruitment invites the opportunity to have a thoughtful discussion of whether the board reflects the diversity of the community it serves. If the board does not, it presents an opportunity to be more intentional about who your organization is and what it values.

## Creating a Diverse Board

Always keep in mind the value of diversity in establishing your "ideal" board composition and identifying any gaps. Diversity on a board ensures varying opinions, approaches, attitudes, and solutions. Diverse teams make better decisions. The goal is to create a board culture that is open-minded, curious, accepting, and responsive. Fill your board with board members willing to work together to advance the organization's mission, vision, and collective purpose.

BoardSource recommends caution with a "checklist" approach to board recruitment, especially when it comes to board diversity, as this can reduce a candidate to a demographic profile. Consider recruiting and retaining multi-faceted leaders and a diverse board. A homogeneous board has impaired decision-making and planning abilities. One race or gender predominating a board is particularly concerning, as the board may select strategies and plans that ineffectively address social issues and injustices or even reinforce them.

## How to Recruit the Ideal Board Composition

According to [Leading with Intent](#), the most successful boards are thoughtfully composed regarding skill sets, leadership styles, and diversity of experience, thought, and background. They understand the leadership needs of their organizations and seek out new board leaders who can bring the expertise, passion, and experience they need both now and into the future.

If your organization has staff, be cautious not to establish a board that mimics or duplicates the work of staff. The board's work is strategy, oversight, and ensuring resources, hopefully by utilizing all the [modes of governance](#) and a [purpose-driven framework](#).

There are many attributes that are appropriate to virtually all governing boards. Examples include

- a commitment to the organization
- lived experience
- a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion or racial equity

Other attributes to consider may include

- professional skills
- philanthropic spirit
- representation of communities you serve
- experience with similarly sized organizations

Finally, the organization may look at unique qualities including geographical representation and affiliations with other organizations relevant to the organization's mission. The board's membership composition matters for multiple reasons, one of which is to be received as a responsible and civic-minded enterprise serving all the people in its community.

There is no fixed formula for determining board composition. The board size and composition usually reflect the work it is trying to accomplish in service to its goals. As outlined in [Purpose- Driven Board Leadership](#), a nonprofit board's ability to help an organization reach its goals depends entirely on who is on the board, what they understand their role to be, and how they prioritize decisions. Each organization can evaluate its unique needs and priorities and build its board accordingly.

## Are there certain types of candidates who may present challenges?

Some types of candidates may add value to your board, while others may have conflicts of interest that can make board leadership more challenging.

Here are some examples:

- a customer or current client
- a major donor or other prominent constituent
- a celebrity
- a family member of a staff member or other board member
- a board member who is under 18 years of age

Visit the Board Recruitment Center for more resources.

[Recruit Board Members](#)

[Serve on a Board](#)

## Guides, Tools, Templates, and Infographics



CEO Dos and Don'ts in  
Recruiting Nonprofit Board  
Members

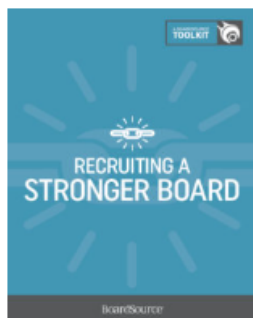


Strategic Board Composition  
Matrix  
*Members-only*



Recruiting the Right Board  
Members  
*Members-only*

## Publications



Recruiting a Stronger Board: A  
BoardSource Toolkit



The Board Building Cycle



Nonprofit Board Committees      To

## Written Resources

All 101-level topical resources listed below are available publicly. BoardSource members and 301-level resources. Don't forget to visit the [BoardSource store](#) or the [Board Recruitment](#) resources and training on this topic.

### [Beyond Political Correctness: Building a Diverse and Inclusive Board >](#)

**101 | Community resource.** Exceptional nonprofit boards recognize that diversity is essential to an organization's correlation between mission, strategy, and board composition and understand that establishing an inclusive culture is essential to establishing a diverse and inclusive board.

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### [Board Members as Providers of Professional Services >](#)

**201 | Members only resource.** Should technical specialty be a necessary criterion for board service? In all-volunteer organizations, professional skills are particularly helpful. However, experts and representatives of specific fields can find the balance of trying to define their role as an active and contributing board member while being expected to perform professional services for the organization.

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### [Board Recruitment Process >](#)

**101 | Community resource.** Having an organized board recruitment process in place not only makes it possible to recruit in an effective and speedy manner, but it creates a foundation for building a skillful and diverse board. It allows you to attract potential candidates and to prepare them to join the board when the time is right.

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### [Board Size: Finding the Sweet Spot >](#)

**101 | Community resource.** Wondering if your board has hit its sweet spot when it comes to size? This resource provides the answer to this question.

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### [Building a Nonprofit Board for the First Time >](#)

**101 | Community resource.** After determining that there is no other organization to partner with, the first challenge for a nonprofit organization is to build a board. This is not a simple task, and involves more than just finding a group of people.

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### [Clients on a Nonprofit Board >](#)

**201 | Members only resource.** It is natural for those receiving services from a nonprofit — or their family members — to want to be on the board both to give back and to influence how the organization functions. There hardly is a more direct way to influence the organization. There is also no better way for the organization to ensure representation and voice of the community.