

The Board's Best Questions

Before accepting an offer to serve on a board, a prospective director should ask a few key questions. The organization's executive director and nominations committee should be armed with the answers:

Is there a roadmap that the board follows? We have a strategic plan spanning three years. The board, committees and staff rely on the plan to stay on course and advance our mission.

Does the board have support and counsel? In addition to an executive director (CEO) who works for and implements decisions of the board, the budget provides for access to an attorney and accountant. Regarding staff, directors are encouraged to have a collegial professional relationship but recognize they are not the boss of the employees.

What if I disagree with the board? Diverse opinions are respected on the board. Inside the board room is the place to express divergent opinions. If you disagree, you are invited to voice your thoughts and to go so far as to record a dissenting vote in the minutes. After the board meeting, you would be expected to express your support for the decisions of the board.

Is there risk associated with board service? While the opportunity to serve outweighs the risk, we have taken steps to protect the board. Directors benefit from doctrine of volunteer immunity statutes, as well as indemnification indicated in our bylaws. The organization is incorporated, another way to protect individuals on the board, and we have purchased directors and officers liability insurance.

Run if You Hear these Answers!

- You won't have to do anything when you get on the board.
- We don't provide the board with financial statements.
- You don't need to worry yourself about that.
- We're too small for an audit.
- We're a corporation – we don't need insurance.
- We're either a c3 or c6 --- I think.

Do we have access to information? An orientation is conducted annually for all board members, supplemented by distribution of governing documents and key information. The board has access to nearly all information with exception of personnel files. We maintain a password protected information portal for directors to have 24/7 access to documents.

Does the board adhere to any guiding principles? Prior boards have identified the values most respected by our members that are always considered in decision making. These include transparency, honest, accountability and innovation.

What about board expectations not described in the governing documents? Prior boards have identified “cultural expectations” and created a document communicating them. These include items such respect for time (meeting will start on time), a request that directors help to enroll members and that directors serve on committees.

While a volunteer may be flattered to be asked to serve, they have a responsibility to inquire about expectations and resources.

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