



Finding the Good Ones

Our board has dwindled in the last couple of years from 12 people to seven. We didn't have a nominating committee, but we have formed one now because there were no obvious candidates to join the board. Luckily, a few of our board members know a lot of people in the community because they have lived and worked here for a long time. They suggested several people to recruit, although a few of them have already said no. We also need more diversity. How can we find good people?

Recruiting new board members who are qualified and committed is one of the most persistent challenges that boards face. It is important to find the right balance of people with different skills and different perspectives, while at the same time making sure they are dedicated individuals with a passion for the cause. Here are four key questions to ask yourself during recruitment:

What are you waiting for? To begin with, your nominating committee should always be active, not just when your board is five members short. Know how long your board members' terms are and plan to begin cultivating new members at least several months before you have vacancies. Members of the nominating committee should think about this responsibility wherever they are – at work, at social and civic events, and any time they meet new people, read the paper, or watch the news.

How will a new candidate fit into the group? The group dynamics of the board are critical to its success. That doesn't mean everyone on the board should be alike or always agree. A certain amount of diversity is necessary and healthy for a board. It does mean that everyone on a board should be willing to listen, learn new things, respect others, and focus on the mission of the organization as opposed to promoting personal agendas. When you're talking with prospective board members, consider inviting them to a board or committee meeting to see how they interact with the group.

Who are you missing? An organization that serves children and families might include parents and educators, and maybe youth, on its board. While it is important to avoid tokenism, it is also worthwhile to think about how to best to include the perspectives of your constituents on your board. If your board is willing to make a commitment to diversity, put it in writing. Remember though, no board member wants to fill a quota, and no one should be expected to. Focus on the board as a diverse mixture of ideas and experiences, not as individuals who represent various ethnicities or other groups.

What expertise are you missing? Every organization should include someone with financial experience who can help board members understand financial statements and keep the board mindful of its financial oversight responsibilities. Knowledge in a variety of areas, including media relations and publicity, fund-raising, marketing, legal issues, and technology, can also be helpful in rounding out a strong board.