

Recruiting Volunteer Board Members from Outside the Organization

Volunteer Boards (VBs) face unique challenges. They include:



1. They receive no compensation for their time or travel
2. They are asked to make (sometimes significant) financial contributions to the organization as a condition of membership
3. They may not have the right skills or experience, but are passionate about the mission and want to help
4. The quality of their contributions (except for their financial giving) is typically not assessed. There are no consequences for exceptionally good or bad performance
5. They are hard to fire!

Recruiting members for Volunteer Boards (VBs) can be easy or difficult, depending on how attractive membership on *your* board appears to potential candidates. If affiliation with your organization is compelling or prestigious, recruiting is best done by word of mouth and networking. If, however, membership on your board is seen as difficult or demanding (albeit worthwhile and rewarding), then recruiting requires casting a wider net.

For word of mouth recruiting, use your current board members and their connections to seek people who can add skill, talent, connections and capabilities to your board. Before your members start looking for candidates, take time to educate them about the qualifications you need in new members. Also caution them about surfacing people to be candidates who they have not carefully vetted themselves. Disappointing someone who has been led to believe their acceptance will be automatic can be awkward and potentially litigious. And of course, if you are board chair, be sure to scan your own connections for potential candidates.

To cast a wider net, use social media. Post the fact that your board is seeking new members, and narrow your post to readers who might be able to add to your board. Include a description of your organization, how it contributes to your community or the general welfare, and the segment(s) it serves. Carefully describe what membership on your board entails. Be clear about the kind of new members you are seeking, the qualifications they need to have, and the time and energy membership on your board requires. Describe the process you go through to qualify and accept new members. Finally, tell potential candidates how to contact you and offer their service.

When using social media for recruiting, be careful to limit the potential audience as narrowly as possible. A broader audience, not tightly targeted, often results in your being inundated with inquiries and applications from people not even remotely qualified to be part of your board.

Always be prepared to conduct a rigorous qualification process for all potential new board members. As stated above, once people become members of volunteer boards they are hard to fire.

We hope this post is the catalyst for a larger conversation about this topic as well as other challenges facing Volunteer Boards. Please “comment” with your thoughts. Other articles in the series can be found on LinkedIn [#VolunteerBoards](#) or at www.larrysolow.com.

Written by Warren Wilhelm