



## So You Want to Serve on the Board

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Board service is a terrific way to give back to your community, and to help organizations you care about achieve goals that support that community. But too often people think of board service as an opportunity for prestige and recognition, and don't realize the hard work – and potential liability – that comes from being on a board.

Before deciding to serve on a Board of Directors, it's important to ask yourself the following questions (and the organization recruiting you may ask some of them too). This list is by no means comprehensive, but gives you a start on the things you should consider before agreeing to serve.

### **Questions to Ask Yourself Before Agreeing to Serve on a Board**

- Why do you want to serve on a board? On this board in particular?
- Do you believe in and support the organization's mission?
- Do you have the time required to be an effective board member? Not just meetings, but also events, donor outreach, planning sessions, and committee service.
- What talents do you bring to the board that you think would be an asset?
- Are you prepared to financially support the organization and its mission? (100% Give, Give or Get)

Once you've determined that it makes sense for you to join a board based on your other commitments and interest in the mission, there are a few questions you should ask the organization to ensure you know what you've committed to and whether this is a high-functioning organization and board, and that it's worth your time to be a part of it.

### **Questions to Ask the Organization Before Agreeing to Serve on the Board**

- How often and where does the board meet?
- How are board members selected?
- What is expected of board members? Will I have an orientation to those expectations?
- Is there a commitment document that board members are expected to sign, and if yes can I review it before committing?
- Are board members who are not fulfilling their obligations encouraged to resign?
- Do board members understand what their responsibilities are versus those of the staff? Do they both respect those boundaries?
- Does the board regularly review their own performance and make adjustments based on the results?
- Are board meetings opportunities for staff to report, or is the board tracking progress on and contributing to the execution of organizational goals?

- Does the organization have a strategic plan? Is it based on board input? Is the board engaged in the execution of identified priorities, or are results staff-driven? How often is the strategic plan revised?
- How would you describe the relationship between the board and the CEO? Is it collaborative or combative?
- Does the organization carry Directors and Officers Liability Insurance? (If not, run.)
- How large is the organization's budget? Is it growing or declining? Do they finish most years in the black? Do they have adequate reserves?
- Does the CEO receive an annual performance review? Does the board have a role in that?

The biggest lie of board recruitment is "Really, it won't take much time." If that's true, it's not a board worth serving on as it's unlikely you'll be doing more to help the organization than warming a chair and lending your name. If it's not true – and it rarely is – you should be very clear regarding board expectations and the condition of the organization before accepting the position. There are real legal responsibilities to serving on a board, and you want to know the organization – and the board – are well managed.

Thank you for your interest in serving on a Board of Directors!