



# Building and Recruiting a More Diverse Board

 **Boardable**

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A woman in a white blazer and grey skirt is leaning over a conference table, smiling. She is looking towards a group of people seated around the table. The room has large windows and a modern interior.

# Building and Recruiting a More Diverse Board

While boards are a critical part of the scalability and sustainability of any organization, what a board looks like and how it is assembled can have a huge impact on its success. Great boards don't build themselves, which is why recruiting stellar board members is such a high priority for organization leaders and sitting board participants alike.

Around **58% of nonprofit boards** say that it's difficult to recruit new members. As a result, many boards rely on a traditional recruitment method that turns to network connections and colleagues. While this is a great first step, it also contributes to creating a stagnant board community that lacks any real diversity.

This ebook will uncover how traditional board recruitment processes create homogenous boards, how innovative boards can keep diversity in mind, and best practices for modern board composition.

# The Traditional Board Recruitment Method

Because nonprofit boards are made up of people, and most people like to surround themselves with comfort, it makes sense that many boards turn to what they know when it comes time to recruit new members. They start with their friends, family, and professional networks to find people who might be interested. Typically, the board recruitment process follows a pretty straightforward process:

**Identifying the gaps:** The traditional board recruitment process starts with the creation of a **board matrix** that maps out all of your current board members, their skills and roles within the board, as well as other details to help determine where holes or gaps exist. Then, once these areas of need are identified, the current board members can start to figure out exactly what they're looking for in a new member.

**Finding and identifying candidates:** Using the board matrix, current board members turn to their networks to identify potential board candidates. If a board needs a new financial secretary, for example, they might think about people they know who are accountants. Boards can also put out feelers with other stakeholders, such as the CEO or president of the organization, to see if they know anyone who might be a good fit.

**Evaluating and/or nominating candidates:** Once a shortlist has been created, it's time to start evaluating the candidates. Sometimes, a **nominating committee** must be involved to bring a candidate up for consideration so that some of the vetting process is out of the way before the entire board gets involved.

**Inviting the new board member to join:** Now it's time to extend a formal invitation to the new recruit to join the board. While this invitation is typically given by the head of the board or chairperson, for more informal boards it could be extended by a personal acquaintance or friend.

It's easy to see how the inherent method of finding and recruiting new board members leaves little room for diverse additions. A diverse board in terms of financial, racial, ethnic, gender, age, experience, and demographic diversity, however, is critical to the success of a nonprofit organization. This diversity can help boards think outside of the box and harness new perspectives to engage with supporters and the community they serve.





# Where to Look for New Board Members While Keeping Diversity in Mind

While the traditional board recruitment method focuses heavily on qualifications and recommendations when choosing new board members, building a diverse board requires a more creative approach. Even though friends, family, and professional networks are a good place to start and spread the word, boards will have to expand their search a bit.

**Look within the organization.** The way nonprofits engage and communicate with the public is changing, which is why looking inside your own organization can deliver some much-needed inspiration. The staff and employees of your nonprofit work with the community and interact with supporters on a daily basis. They can help point you in the direction of a perfect candidate, or you might find someone on the team who would be a great fit.

**Draw from members of the local community.** Sometimes, nonprofit boards garner a reputation for being aloof or above the day-to-day issues that

are actually addressed or impacted by the work of the nonprofit organization itself. Instead of leaning into this reputation and adding to the homogenous makeup of a board, current members can instead look to the local community for a much-needed jolt of excitement and diversity. A member of a local government team, or an educator, or even a law enforcement professional would be the perfect addition to a board looking for demographic or socio-economic diversity.

**Turn to a board-match site.** In many cases, boards are leveraging a mixture of both the traditional recruitment method and a more modern, diverse recruiting strategy. After creating a board matrix and figuring out where the operational gaps are, boards can turn to a [nonprofit board-match site](#) to find potential candidates. This way, boards can quickly identify candidates who are qualified to contribute to the board in a professional capacity while still meeting the diverse needs at hand.

# How to Build a Diverse Board at Scale

Finding qualified candidates is hard enough when going the traditional route, but it's even more difficult when reaching outside a comfort zone. Furthermore, diversity is even more critical in today's nonprofit world for teams that are still small or growing. For a nonprofit to succeed over the long term, the internal team and board must reflect the community they are serving.

Whether you're working to build a more diverse board at a small, scaling, or seasoned nonprofit, keep the following in mind:

**Make diversity a priority.** If your team is still small enough that you are developing your culture and mission, make it a priority to focus on diversity and cultural identity. As a board, work with the employees of the organization on the hiring process and how diversity is being addressed within the organization.

**Discuss diversity during board meetings.** Diversity shouldn't be a taboo or awkward conversation topic during a board meeting. Boards should be open and direct when discussing diversity and should always have a goal in mind when hiring. It's not enough to say, "We need to find two more women to join." Instead, think about why you need these women to join the team.

**Look for first-time board members.** Yes, your team is still small and yes, it might be hard to find experienced board members at this time. This shouldn't stop you from finding people who want to join your cause. While first-time board members might lack experience and recommendations, they could still have the skills you're looking for, as well as a go-getter attitude and a unique perspective.

**Market yourself as a diverse organization.** Whether your team is just getting started or is in the growth phase, marketing yourself as a diverse organization from the board down can help from both a PR and HR perspective. On the PR side, donors, partners, and sponsors will be more likely to work with you early on in your tenure since you are actively promoting your dedication to diversity. And on the internal side, hiring new heterogeneous employees and, of course, board members will only become easier as your team grows.





# Board Composition Best Practices

Building a diverse board doesn't have to be hard or confusing, but it should be on your board priority list for 2019. As Millennials continue to become the **driving force** behind nonprofit donations and engagement, nonprofits themselves must market themselves to this "aware" audience. And, since nonprofit leadership stems from a board, the board itself should look and feel like the organization and the community it is serving. As your team works to build a more diverse board, keep the following best practices in mind:

- Don't approach diversity solely with regard to race. Look at the age, gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic makeup of your board and diversify from there.
- Do leverage your personal and professional networks to search for candidates, but don't jump on the first candidate you come across.
- Do be open and honest with your entire board and organization about your diversification goals and what you're looking for in a new board member.
- Don't lose sight of the goals, mission, and vision of your organization in your quest to diversify your board.
- Do reflect the population you serve on your board in a meaningful way.

# About Boardable

Boardable takes mission-critical board and committee meetings from friction to focus. Founded by experienced board executives, the intuitive board management platform brings teams together — wherever they are — so they can prepare, engage, and take action on what matters most. Boardable powers more than 2,000 organizations in over 40 countries, including associations, nonprofits, healthcare, higher education, and enterprise businesses. Learn more at [www.boardable.com](http://www.boardable.com).



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