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Transcript of October 2020 Board Recruitment Webinar

Caroline: Welcome, everyone. My name is Caroline from Boardable. If you've never heard of Boardable before, we are the central location for everything your board needs. Whether it's document storage, polls and voting online, if you need to do attendance, RSVPs, anything that your board needs to communicate to each other you can do in one central place, no more digging through all your email. So come find us at boardable.com and you can start a free trial of Boardable and see for yourself. Right, Adriane, you're a Boardable user?

Adriane: I am a Boardable user. I just used it this morning. I absolutely think it's great, it's [inaudible 00:00:49].

Caroline: Thank you for joining us today. I'm so excited to introduce Adriane, she's gonna talk to us about the basics of board building. We know this is always a tricky issue for nonprofits. And if you're kind of sweating where you're gonna find your next board member, you won't be after this webinar, right?

Adriane: I sincerely hope so.

Caroline: Okay. Well, I'm gonna let you take it over from there and teach us all about board building.

Adriane: Okay, great. So I'll tell you a little bit about myself, Adriane Johnson-Williams. I have been a board chair now three times over. A startup board, a turnaround board, and a board with some great stability. So I've had a bit of experience trying to recruit in different contexts. And I just onboarded new board members for two organizations in the middle of a pandemic. So now I feel like a real pro.

I am going to kind of talk you through what I see the challenges are of kind of nonprofit boards and recruitment right now, and then give you what I've come up with as my own sense of what a board recruitment cycle might be that's different in several ways from the traditional approach. So just to make sure we're all speaking the same language, I'm gonna go through a bit of those challenges. And please do, as Caroline said, ask questions as we go.

The first thing I'm gonna do even before getting into the challenge is really talk about the purpose of nonprofit boards. So typically, in most states, the purpose is pretty straightforward, it's legal and financial accountability, right. So the language may differ across the country but that tends to be the only thing that states require. How that gets translated into practice is a matter of local and organizational culture. The way that I like to think about it is that it's the role of the board to partner with the executive and hold them accountable.

Two, making sure that all the legal and financial work is done properly to prevent executive isolation, right, so that they have some backup. A really good board chair executive director relationship can be very healthy for an organization. And then to support the executive as a full board, because that's how you get to organizational success. So I wanna start there to say that's what the purpose is and that's how you'd wanna think about who you want on your board.

So I think of the kind of nonprofit board challenges often starting with this issue of the board matrix. If you Google, "Do we need the board matrix?" You'll see some people on both sides of it. No, you don't need a

matrix. Yes, you do need a matrix. Well, I come from a results-based place where the only way you're gonna know you're doing what you said you were gonna do is if you have a plan. And you can't plan for your board if you don't have a matrix. So I'm on the board matrix yes side. You need to know what knowledge and skills you need on your board, and who do you have, and who are you gonna recruit for.

You need to know what diversity looks like on your board, even a small board. There may be ways that you have desires to have your board reflect your community or your clientele, you're gonna need to count. Even if there are only five people on the board you need to count to figure out who you have. And then resources, right, what are the resources? What are the networks that your board members or potential board members have that you can get access to? So you're gonna need the board matrix, that's my first. This doesn't have to be a challenge just do it. The other big question... Caroline, you're about to say something?

Caroline: Oh, I was just saying I'm shocked that there's conflicting opinions or information in the nonprofit sector. [inaudible 00:05:10].

Adriane: Yeah, you know, sometimes, you know, just a little bit it happens. So the other question around how many board members you need is a question that I get all the time from clients and discuss quite a bit as a board chair. And my general sense is you need enough board members to make sure you've hit your state minimum, and to be committee chairs, right? What are the committees that you absolutely need because not all boards need a lot of committees?

I can tell you right now, I'm on a board that recently only had five people. Our state minimum is three. And we worked really effectively for this organization and turn around. We recently added several people, because there's different work to be done now, so we're gonna need more people. So I think you need to have a board size that's consistent with your need. And your bylaws should allow you to be flexible. And you need an odd number because, you know, who really wants to be trying to duke it out over a vote that's a close vote. So you need an odd number. But there's another thing...

Caroline: Court situation right?

Adriane: Exactly. You gotta have an odd number. So in terms of board size, one of the things that I don't think people think about is the number of non-voting committee members you can have, right? So one organization that I was board chair for we had a lot of challenges with recruitment. And I'm gonna say that I am going to be giving examples of what I've done, what my clients have done. So I'm not recommending anything that I haven't seen work. So we had a program committee and we were constantly trying to figure out who we were gonna recruit across all of our committees every single year, it was always a challenge. And what I decided to do was expand our volunteer recruitment to recruit people to serve on board committees. And we're gonna talk more about that as we go. So I want you to think about how much work you have not just in terms of voting members, but also in terms of non-voting committee members because you'll have a ready pool for recruitment.

So here's the cycle. This is the cycle that we're generally told we should follow, right. You identify and you might have somebody you identify in, you know, 2015, and they're not ready to 2019. I'm currently one year out from... I tell people they need to be on a two-year waitlist for me to even consider being on a board. So sometimes it's gonna take some time to get people on your board. And so the identification process is always happening. The cultivation process typically requires a lot of board time, different people going to meet with people, convince their friends, right the cultivation process. And then you go through the other components, right. So this is typically one but the identification one I think is the one where a lot of people get stuck because they don't have a pool.

Another challenge is closed social networks. So I picked this photo because it's a ratty old membership roll book. And what happens if you have closed social networks is that the pool gets real stale because you're always recruiting the same group of people in your...just like you trade-off. Okay, would you come be on this board with me, please? Yeah, then I'll go be on this board with you, okay. But you said you were gonna be...could you be on? And I know in Memphis, we have a 60 plus percent Black population in Memphis, there are just a handful of Black people I see on boards. So it's like, why...I know tons more people who could be on these boards, why are you always calling these five people? Because people have closed social networks. So we're gonna talk a bit about how to overcome that.

Caroline: That's so interesting because, you know, I've been saying for a couple of years I wanna be on a board and can't, like, find a board to be on. And yet, like you said, you'll have the same 10 people on lots of different boards.

Adriane: Because nobody is inviting you. Like if you don't [know the people on the board](#), then you won't know who to contact, right. Nobody will be contacting you. I see a question here that I'm going to go ahead and answer about a board matrix that I recommend. I don't have a specific format that I recommend. I typically say to people that all you need really is a basic spreadsheet and the diversity categories, and the characteristics that are important to you. And you keep track of that. So it's really as simple as a spreadsheet. I think we can overcomplicate things sometimes. But my spreadsheets if it's local, it's just the kind of race ethnicity characteristics, gender identity characteristics, and other things that are critical to the organization.

Caroline: So that's gonna depend on your particular work.

Adriane: Exactly. So if you need people with medical experience that needs to be somebody on your...you need to see, I need somebody who has clinical experience. And yes, a board can be way too big. So you want your board, your voting board, to be a size that is consistent with the work that you have to do.

Caroline: Definitely.

Adriane: Caroline, somebody said they're looking for board members. So if you want to be on a board I think you've got an offer from Carolyn Rubin [inaudible 00:11:19].

Caroline: Carolyn, meet Caroline. That's so funny, matchmaking service.

Adriane: So the next section is really about what does this new board recruitment cycle look like? And how do you maximize diversity of all types according to the needs of your organization? So this board recruitment cycle has at least one more step and it has some greater definition. So because I come from a results-based background, and it continues to improvement background, I feel like if you don't have planning explicitly a part of your board recruitment cycle, then, you know, there's a problem. So you really have to plan. And you have to plan at the end of the fiscal year before you get into the next one, right? You have to have your plan together for what your recruitment cycle is gonna look like the next year. And planning is where that board matrix comes in, right? Who do we have? Who do we need? Who's planning to leave right after, you know, in that last quarter? Are you gonna be around? You really need to come up with a plan. And then your plan will determine kind of all the steps that come after. So we're gonna go into that next.

So let's talk about planning. So going back, what are your targets? What are your [goals](#), right? So if you know that your board is racially disproportionately, like, balanced to your community or your client base, you're probably gonna set some targets. I would say it's important to set targets out for a couple of years

because if people aren't gonna roll-off, you can't just kick people off of your board if you wanna change the mix, right? You have to do it in a way that's consistent with your bylaws and your rotation schedule. But once you set the targets, it'll let you know how to kind of really go out and find the people you need.

You also want...for the person who's talking about the board matrix, this again goes to what knowledge and skills do you need? I'm on a board where we really do need people with knowledge of the kind of clinical work in the psychology field. We need people with research background, we need people who can help us think about the various liability associated with providing mental health services in a nonprofit space, right. So it's great to have those people on your board, obviously, because you don't have to pay for the guidance you get [inaudible 00:14:05] to the point of getting volunteers with lots of knowledge and experience.

What does diversity mean for your organization? So I would say in the environments where people are in the nonprofit sector trying to have a board that reflects their client base, then you're going to need to really look at race-ethnicity. We have an organization and...several organizations, like Planned Parenthood, like your LGBTQ organizations, like your other reproductive health organizations, where gender identity and sexual orientation might need to be represented on your board because that's your client base.

One of the areas that I think is challenging for people is to determine kind of how to integrate people who are not of the same social class as people tend to be on boards, right. We have to admit that there's a socio-economic barrier sometimes. And even having clients and constituents who can be on boards, even if they are not voting members because they might have some self-dealing if their clients are constituents. So you wanna think about what kind of diversity means for your organization.

And then what resources. Do people have money? Board members are responsible for the money of the organization or for giving. So you wanna have some people who have money. But you don't wanna make that exclusively what people bring, right? Do they bring access to other resources and whatnot, okay? So the planning part really takes time. I see a question here that I definitely wanna go ahead and answer. And it was around kind of dealing with the financial give-get commitment. We're gonna get to the evaluation components so if you're curious about that, that's where that section is gonna be.

Caroline: I think one interesting point here that one of our nonprofit contributors at Boardable always brings up about the knowledge and skills is, you know, some people, maybe they're an accountant for their day job, but they don't wanna do that for their board. So I guess you have to be clear that that's a skill they actually want to contribute [inaudible 00:16:21] too, you know.

Adriane: Yep, that's a real important part of the interview process. Because you don't wanna invite somebody onto the board and tell them that we need you to look at our finances. That's not why I'm here. I don't wanna do this in my own time. So that's why you need to have an interview process for sure.

The next part, I've seen a lot of questions pop up around this is around this idea of where do you find the people? Well, one of the things that I think has become for me...it was really obvious when it finally landed, but I realized it's not as obvious for everyone. We recruit for volunteers all the time to do very specific things. We have often, depending on the size of the organization, volunteer managers, some of us have volunteer portals. Board members are volunteers, right? We're asking people to do a specific piece of work for a specific piece of time for no money. That is essentially volunteering, right? And it's possible to recruit them the same way you would recruit for other jobs and for volunteers.

And so while you could have just a regular post out there, are you interested in joining on our board on your website, or on your social media, for your annual recruitment, you wanna customize what you're

looking for. If you came up with a plan that said you need people with these three skills, and you're looking for more people who are Spanish English bilingual. Because of the kind of just basically the intellectual capacity they have to understand what it means to be bilingual in the world, right. Then you need to recruit for that. You need a job description.

So if you don't have job descriptions for your board members right now, everybody should have a job...there should be a board description. "This is what the job is for being on the board. And here's the individual responsibilities of board members," right. So I would say, have really good job descriptions, post them. Post them on your website, "We're recruiting for the board for this this year," right? People will be active beginning at this time. To your email list, your volunteers, your donors, "Hey, it's time to start recruiting for the board we're building our pool, please let us know if you wanna consider here, apply here," right.

There are some management support organizations for nonprofits and communities that have job boards and there are various volunteer recruitment services out there that you can sign up for and recruit. One other idea that a friend of mine gave me recently...and I haven't tried it yet, but I've written about it and I'm gonna run with it. And those are those employee resource groups at the major companies in your community. Where you connect with them and companies that have their community engagement offices and whatnot, they communicate with their employees throughout the entire company, here are some opportunities. So build a pool of people who you can recruit for voting and non-voting needs. So whatever descriptions you put out need to be very clear about what the ask is.

Caroline: So this is really exciting, too, because all of these things we can do during COVID?

Adriane: Yeah, [inaudible 00:19:42].

Caroline: [inaudible 00:19:41] work all day you don't have time to meet new board members or, you know, to court them or whatever. But all of this we can do online.

Adriane: Yes. And I think just like you, Caroline, there are a lot of people out there if these things came across their social media or their email from organizations they support, you know, if you're donating to an organization, you've already checked the first box of being a good board member, right? So boom, they give, let's see if they wanna be on the board, right. But there are other ways to do this.

Someone asked about should board members submit their volunteer hours for tracking? You know, this is a question I've been asking about for volunteer managers among colleagues of mine. Because there's also the issue of understanding what the value of your volunteer base is. And some of your board members, depending on what their work is and what their life is, the value of their hour in their marketplace is really significant. And to be able to acknowledge what they've essentially donated to the organization is interesting. I don't know what the tax implications are of actually really acknowledging it that way but to just track it, it does make sense. But board members would have to do that work, right. So there is that.

The other thing is once you have a pool of people, you have all these applications that will come pouring in because people love your organization, they've just been waiting for the opportunity to be asked to volunteer, you have to get a sense from each person who rises to the top, right. So you're reviewing these like you would a job application, right? And you're gonna have your pool but then you're gonna have a few people who rise to the top. You want to understand their interest because everybody who says, "Yeah, I think I wanna be on a board" may not understand what that means. So I know there are different tools...our management support organization in Memphis has it. I have one just a free webinar that I offer.

There are all sorts of options out there, what does it mean to be on a board, right? So you wanna make sure they understand that.

And if it turns out they don't wanna be on the board as a voting member, what other things might they want to do, right? Do they want to just be on your program committee? Are they interested in just helping you raise money? They could be on your fund development committee? Or really, are they just interested in having a more robust volunteer opportunity in your organization, right? And are they interested in giving money? Because if you find somebody who's not interested in giving money...and I don't mean a lot of money. But even people who... Memphis as I say, again, is one of the poorest cities in the country, but one of the most generous, people are always giving, right. So if they don't wanna give even like $5 a year, then they may not be good for your board.

The other thing you wanna do in an interview is be really clear about every role that they are considering, what the responsibilities are, what the expectations are, and what the accountability procedures are. So this goes to how to get people to live up to their expectations. And so, those kinds of things should already be written. So if you don't have those, you wanna take time as a board or have your governance committee if you have one, take the time to be very clear about what those job descriptions are, what the expectations are, what the accountability procedures are.

And then you wanna get references. So this goes to that closed social network situation, right? If you don't have a relationship with somebody, you don't have somebody on your board who's saying, "I vouch for this person," then you're still gonna need to know whether they're likely to be a good fit and whether they actually will do the things they say they're going to do. So just like a job interview, you really do need to get references and have conversations with people who have served with them on boards before. Or if they're new to board governance, who can give them character references. You just need to do your due diligence when it comes to boards cultivating all the possibilities.

I need to note this one that we need to give a link to someone about how to...people can be like what does it mean to be a board member? So Caroline, if you'll make no for that we'll follow-up. But also, there are some other questions around job descriptions and things like that. I know that BoardSource is a really good resource for getting these kinds of things, basic job descriptions boardsource.org. So I recommend that people go there. I have my clients go there all the time because there's not going to be reinventing those. So they have sample job descriptions, and they have some basics on what does it mean to be on a board as well in written form.

Caroline: I believe they have matrices as well.

Adriane: They have that too. It's really a treasure trove. I really spend a lot of time with BoardSource materials,

Caroline: I'm gonna do a quick search over there and see if I can drop something in the chat for us.

Adriane: So after you've gotten everybody onboard, you've got all the people you need to vote, you've got your committees are now bigger than ever because everybody wants to help on committees but they may not wanna be on boards, then I think we need to think about orientation and onboarding in a very different way. You definitely want your standard orientation where you cover all of these things. Because that is typically where people sign off to say, "Okay, I understand all my responsibilities, here's my signature, you can hold me to it. I have signed my, you know, conflict of interest document. I've, you know, learned a little bit about your finances and how you're gonna review finances, right." So you need to do that. And you don't wanna skip that ever because it can cause problems around holding people accountable.

But I think it's also important to onboard people over time. That if you maybe do some kind of old new partnering, that way the board chair isn't the person that everyone calls for help, they can develop relationships with other people on the board, right. So that's part of building your community, but also having that older...the member who's been there for a while check-in.

The other thing is that board development is part of your orientation and onboarding process. So in that first year of service, people need to know that there's a kind of culture around learning and development, and being skilled. The most important thing I would say, aside from culture, which we'll get to, is really around understanding the money part of it because you're fiduciaries. Board members are fiduciaries. So people need to know how to read the financial statements, because when the minutes come out, and it says that the financial statements were accepted, everybody is legally accountable for having read the financial statements. So that is something people need to know how to do. People need to understand what it means to participate in fundraising. Not everybody is gonna pick up the phone and call someone. But there are other roles that board members can play and that they should be playing.

And then if there are specialized pieces of knowledge for your organization, the board members are not necessarily gonna come with that knowledge. If you are a community-based organization that relies on community organizing, and you have board members who are really about making sure that power is distributed fairly in your community, but has never done community organizing, they're not going to know how messy it can be. They're not gonna understand when some things kind of flare-up that could make you kind of look bad in the media. So it's important for them to understand what the nature of the work is, what to expect. So those kinds of board development opportunities are important to do not just at orientation, but at least throughout the...well, actually it's throughout the entire year. But that new people are gonna need some of this, particularly in the first year.

I've seen two committee questions that I wanna answer that I missed. One was around having head of a committee that isn't on the board. I would say I wouldn't recommend having a committee head that isn't on the board. But I think you could have some sort of subcommittee or ad hoc work, a special project where the head of the committee isn't on the board. But the reality is that only a board member can move something from committee to the full board. So if you don't have a person on the committee who is representing the actual voting board, then you're probably not gonna get much out of that committee. Just in terms of your ability to really advocate at the level of the board for what is coming out of that committee.

The other thing someone asked is, how many committees or subcommittees do you need? And my answer is always what kind of work do you need to get done? So like I'm board chair of two boards right now and we don't have any committees. The board where we just added new people, we're about to start committees around fundraising, and research, and evaluation because it's around mental health. And so, we're gonna be inviting people from the community to serve on those committees. And only one board member will be required to be on the committee.

In terms of how many committees a single board member should be on. I really...and I get pushback. So this is another one of those areas, Caroline, where there's a lot of disagreement in the field. As a board chair do not feel I need to be on any committees. Like, I don't have time for that because I'm charing the whole board. And I have my own committee, right, I have the executive committee.

And then there's the other committees: governance committee, finance committee, right. So your treasurer is probably gonna be your chair of your finance committee. So you've got your officer, right, being there. I think that officers who have their own committees don't need to be on any other committees. And I think that if it's possible to have people never serve on more than two committees that is the way to do it. But to ask that people at least serve on one. Board work...

Caroline: Go ahead,.

Adriane: Board work can be really heavy depending on the life stage of the organization, startups, new boards, or working boards, there's a lot of work to be done. But the kind of older the board is if it's a healthy board, you probably don't need a lot of people doing a lot of work on committees. You could be on multiple committees because the work is less.

Caroline: Yeah, I guess that could be an indicator of needing more board members if everybody is having to wear too many hats.

Adriane: Yeah, or needing more committee members.

Caroline: Yes, to take it off of the board [inaudible 00:31:51].

Adriane: Exactly. And that would be something just to say people have to check their bylaws too to determine if that's something. So for the, you know, "Star Trek" people, you probably recognize this as the Borg cube. We do not wanna be the Borg, we do not want to force people to assimilate to our board culture, right? We want [crosstalk 00:32:15.252].

Caroline: [crosstalk 00:32:15.444].

Adriane: We do want them to acculturate though. So people often use those words interchangeably, but I wanna kind of offer up an important distinction. Assimilation is literally just sucking somebody in saying you have to be us, right? This is who we are, you have to be us. But what is the point of having diversity on your board if everybody is the same? So what you want is to be clear about your board culture is. And when I say culture, I mean things like, we always check in with each other at the beginning of board meetings, right. We don't just start a board meeting, we go around and find out how everybody is doing, right? This is part of our culture.

We always do what we say we're gonna do. People don't show up to these board meetings not having done their work, because that's not acceptable to us as a community. That is not our culture. We have all taken the time to understand how it is we're supposed to show up in the community so nobody can ever come to one of us and get a different story. That's who we are. So you want people to adopt those things. But then you want people to bring all the other things that you've recruited them for. Because if you've recruited them for specific knowledge, skills, expertise, dispositions, connections, you want for that to show up, you don't wanna close that down.

So, you know, culture management, and thinking about how you're acculturating people without trying to assimilate them is important. And it's even more important when you're talking about identity diversity because people from different cultures and communities show up in different ways. And you wanna be clear about the difference between people being culturally different, and people not acculturating, right. Those are two different things. It doesn't matter where you come from, what your background is, but you can show up and know that we're gonna check in with you every meeting find out how you doing. That's not a culturally necessarily specific thing, it is culturally specific to our board.

Caroline: That is a really interesting distinction. And I think, too, it's so important with the diversity piece if you're trying to bring in people who, you know, might have a different background than the other board members and you force them to be just like the other people somehow that's not gonna work.

Adriane: Yeah, what's the point of diversity if everybody has to be the same? That's just not, you know, just [inaudible 00:34:52]. And the last piece is evaluate. So I know from working with a lot of my clients that...and from kind of looking around the community here that this piece is a challenge. Because we think about accountability often as punishment, or judgment, or shaming. But we're gonna go with Brené Brown and say, shame really has no place in a healthy relationship.

Caroline: Yes, I love it.

Adriane: So shared accountability is that we have come to an agreement of what is expected of all of us and we're all agreeing that we're gonna do it. And if we don't do it, we're agreeing to be accountable for that. To say, "I didn't do it, here's why." Or "I can't do it, maybe I'm not suited for this role, right." So shared accountability is really about agreeing as a group to take responsibility. But as an organization, as a board, you have to structure accountability. And by that, you need to have a committee. Or you need to have the tasks that are associated with governance built into another committee. So the governance committee work, I really encourage people to go out and poke around and understand why the governance committee is so important.

But if you don't have a governance committee, you don't have anyone regularly doing assessments of the board, right? Some people recommend these big assessments only every two or three years. I tell my clients to do a...like you have your list of obligations, your expectations of individual board members, your practices that you're supposed to be engaging in as a board. It doesn't take anything in the fourth quarter of the year to send out a survey to hear from people how they think things are going so that you can think about your board development agenda for the next year, right? It's possible to do that.

The other thing that a governance committee is responsible for is monitoring. So you don't wanna wait till the end of the year...this is also part of my continuous improvement background. You don't wanna wait to the end of the year to find out that people haven't given, or people haven't been attending, or people aren't participating, or people aren't doing what they're supposed to do. You have to do that on a regular basis. And somebody's job has to be to do that and that's the work of the governance committee to track attendance. To let people know, hey, we're only supposed to meet these two meetings, you've missed two meetings, do you wanna talk about what's happening, you know, so that we can determine kind of what your ongoing interest is?

Giving, we have a minimum amount you're supposed to give. It looks like you're not on track to make that, what is your plan? Or we're getting into the fourth quarter and you haven't made a gift yet, what is your plan, right? Participation, you're coming to meetings, but it seems like you're not prepared. It feels like this is the way you're showing up in the meeting, is there anything we can do to help you be more successful, right? So the governance committee is like the HR group of the board, basically. They're the ones to say...

Caroline: [inaudible 00:38:15].

Adriane: ...this is how governance works, and here are all the things that you need to be doing and we're here to support you in being successful. The executive assistant for one of the boards that I served on said, "I love the way you say we're gonna give people opportunities to succeed," right? So we're giving you every opportunity to succeed that is the role of the governance committee. If you integrate the tasks into the executive committee, then it becomes the role of the officers to take on the responsibility for monitoring and for reviewing the evaluations.

Caroline: And this is too where those job descriptions are gonna come in handy because then they're so like, "Well, I didn't realize I was supposed to x, y, z [inaudible 00:39:01] fill it out before [inaudible 00:39:03].

Adriane: Yeah, because if you have the general board roles and responsibilities, and the individual job description of board members, and even if you have committees, like you can have...anytime you have somebody doing a job, you can have a description of what that is and what the expectations are.

The other thing I wanna say that I realized I forgot to say around those committees is that if you're recruiting people to committees who aren't voting board members, and you've got your eye on some people, either governance committee can be tasked with looking at their data, like are they giving, are they showing up for committee meetings, and putting them at the top of the list for recruitment for the next board cycle, right, because it's almost like a trial run. If you have somebody on a committee for a year they give, they show up to all the meetings, they're super enthusiastic, they're great to be around, maybe that person can move on to the board at some point if they decide that they've given it a trial run and they like you as much as you like them.

Caroline: I love that.

Adriane: And the last thing I have and we can really then get into these questions is a quote that I cannot find the origins to. It's just out there randomly on plaques everywhere on the interwebs. And it is "I don't fear commitment. I fear wasting my time." And one of the things that is really a benefit of having good structure to your board recruitment cycle, and your job descriptions, and your accountability systems, is people have a sense that you're serious as a group, and you're not gonna be wasting their time. Because you've taken the time to prepare, to recruit, to assess, to give people feedback, right? You have work for them to do, you're holding them accountable for it. That kind of structure just like kids need structure, I feel like we don't know enough but adults also need structure in community. It's good to be able to say, "This is why I'm here, this is what I'm doing, and my time is valuable to you." So that is what I have for you today. Let's get into some questions maybe.

Caroline: Wonderful. Thank you so much. I know there are a ton of questions in here because it's such a important and complicated topic for people. As you're entering more questions in the chat area there, and we'll get to the ones that were entered previously as well, I just wanted to mention a webinar we have coming up on November 10th, it's on strategic planning in uncertain times. Gee, I don't know why any of us would need that, right? You can join us to discuss a framework for long-term planning even when every month is a new, fresh hell in this year, 2020, right. So you can find the registration on boardable.com as well as we'll send that in the replay, too. But let's start getting to those questions. So I just wanna ask in general terms how have you seen this change through the COVID era? Is it harder to meet people? Is it easier? What are you seeing, like, [crosstalk 00:42:14.889].

Adriane: I've always thought people who are passionate about an issue or interested in a topic are still available to talk. For the recruitment that I did, we recruited and got five new members on one of our board...four new members on our board. It was literally a matter of picking up the phone...well sending them an email saying, "Hey, here are some materials, right, can I talk to you?" Making those phone calls. And the enthusiasm, "Oh, my gosh, I love your organization, I've been watching from a distance. I think this is an important topic what can I do to help, right?"

And it's also easier to schedule conversations in COVID because most people who are...you know, they know what their timeline is, they know that they're probably not gonna have to leave their house or they can do it in between depending on what kind of work they do. And they can just get on their phone or get on their webcam, right. So I found recruitment this year much easier than in years past. And to be honest,

this year, I didn't even really do the job postings in the same way because we had so much interest we didn't really need to do pool building.

I am about to do the job postings for another organization soon because there are some other skills that we're gonna need to add to that board. But recruitment has been really easy for us. But, you know, not every... Once you get the job descriptions out there, it may be harder to get people to buy because people don't understand board services sometimes. And people have had a lot of bad experiences on boards. So you lose the edge of sitting in front of someone and watching them, and feeling their energy and saying "Feels like you might have some other issues about serving on boards, how can I help you with that?" So we have to find other ways to get past that barrier.

Caroline: Yeah, I didn't think of that. But that makes a lot of sense that you do need to do some reading of people sometimes in these conversations. Let's see. Angela asks, so she is recording...recruiting, excuse me, possible members but they have to be parents of students in her course or the school, pool is parents of students. So what can we do when we have like a limited type of board member we can [inaudible 00:44:58.817]?

Adriane: Wow, when the pool is restricted, I think this is one that you really have to be more enticing. So it's important to...you'd have to really spend time getting to know some people in the pool, figuring out who are the people who are most engaged in general. And then taking the time to really market to them, right. Make sure you're communicating with them well, let them know what's happening on the board. Provide opportunities to learn about what does it mean to be on a board? I can't say that enough that one of the things that has become most popular in my world right now is the kind of what does it mean to be on a board question because turns out people really don't know.

So I think you have to develop almost your own marketing plan for that group. And engage in conversations, have little info sessions, you know. "Hey, I wanna...you know, who's interested in talking about, like, this decision we're about to make on the board. And we'd like to get some parents' input on it," right? So you wanna try to engage people in the work and also enticing them into becoming a part of it.

Caroline: Great. Okay, we have another question here about the give-get commitment. How do you recommend setting that? This particular board has an operating budget of about 10 million, so how do you feel about that?

Adriane: I feel like that's one of those really organizationally cultural things. It depends on how healthy the board is financially if you want people...healthy the organization is. If your board has to be responsible for 10% of your fundraising, then you're gonna wanna have a conversation with your board around what is the....well, let's use this example. If your operating budget is $10 million and you need your board to raise a million dollars every year, then you're gonna have a very different conversation with that group about what they need to give individually, and what they need to go get, right. And with the help of your development team.

If you have a smaller organization and you don't have a lot of...a large budget, then that number might look different, right? So I feel like 10% is the most I've ever heard anybody say, of the board's responsibility. Well-endowed organizations often really ask for a significant gift, right? So the boards I'm on it's a significant gift we just adopted that language. And having individual conversations with people about what significant might mean for them. So that tends to be a very unsatisfactory answer for people but, that is...

Caroline: They want hard numbers, right?

Adriane: Yeah.

Caroline: It's great for this follow-up question of, you know, if we're working towards people with diverse backgrounds, how does that give-get commitment work with lower-income impeccably, you know.

Adriane: And that's why the significant gift language is appealing to me. I know that there are people we wanna get on the board. For instance, Girls Inc of Memphis was my first board chair role, I was very unsuccessful at getting a governance committee started when I was there. And I was unsuccessful in getting parents and girls on the board. But we were doing a lot of work it wasn't that there was resistance we just couldn't get to it. I saw the announcement recently that they now have added girls to the board and parent, right. So I'm excited that they finally got there.

But I am certain that the expectation of what girls give as a board member is different from the expectation of what the board members give. And possibly what parents give given the income status of most of our families. And so we want to ask everyone for a gift no matter what they have, because truthfully, it is insulting to have people and assume that they can't give. But you wanna ask everyone to give at a level that is something that they can manage and that's appropriate for them.

Caroline: Love that. Yes, let's see. Bobby here comments, "Is there a way we can share our nonprofit info to all like a roster," I guess is what that is. I wish. We had talked about offering some sort of portal like that in Boardable but we haven't gotten that far. I know that's a big need for like a database of board openings, and board opportunities, and potential board members. Everyone keep an eye out for that and if somebody finds something share it with the [crosstalk 00:49:58.793]

Adriane: Locally they have them. I know I've never used them, but VolunteerMatch I think is a national platform with local and regional options to post for board positions and other types of volunteer jobs. In New York State, they have Governance Matters that does their kind of board listings and board recruitment. They actually do board recruitment for you and board matching. So every city-state region has its own thing, but I'm pretty sure most places have a resource. If you go to the I wanna say The Alliance for Nonprofit Management, that may be the wrong organization, but there's a national organization where they'll tell you who your management support organization is in your community and how to become a part of that group.

Caroline: Okay, here's a really great question. What is the role of the executive director with the board? Someone asked if they should be on the board? I know, there's differing opinions on that. So what role does this person play in the recruitment of the board members?

Adriane: So I am in the board members...the executive director should not be voting members of the board camp, that's my general position. Because it's hard to be the body that holds someone accountable when they have equal standing with you in that way. But I do think that executive director should be in the boardroom during board meetings, right, that is their...it is appropriate for them to be there. And unless there's an executive session, there should not be a meeting without the executive director. In some organizations, they're listed as ex officio, which means that they are on the board, but they don't have a vote. So that's my position on that.

When it comes to recruiting board members, it depends on the life cycle of the organization. Startups typically, the boards are chosen by the executive director, because this is their idea they've come up with, and they're gonna go out and get people to be on their board, right. Over time, though, I think the role of the executive director is to make recommendations if there are people out there that they want on the board. But ultimately, it's the board's job to interview to manage the recruitment.

And I feel like there should be a conversation between the executive director and potential board members in concert with the board chair. So that there should be these conversations where they all talk together or where at least that conversation is there, because there also has to be a sense from the executive director that this potential board member respects them` and will support the work of the organization, right? So I think that's a worthy reason to have them participate in that way.

I do not think that executive directors should be recruiting board members, that is the role of the board. They can recommend, they can say, "I've met this person, I think you should consider them." But they should not be out, in my opinion, talking to someone saying "You should be on our board." Which, oddly enough is how I got on my first board. But I got there and ultimately became board chair, it was because the board wasn't doing that work, right. So the board...you know, you have to do your work as a board so that your executive director isn't taking over and kind of crossing those boundaries.

Caroline: Let's see, we have a lot of questions about brand new nonprofits or startups finding board members with that, seems like it would be a similar procedure you just have a precedent.

Adriane: Right. It would be a similar procedure. I think it's also part of announcing the organization, introducing the organization to the community to the world gives you an opportunity to recruit. Mind you for a startup, you really do need people who are deeply committed to the work and who believe in the executive, right. So that would be the kind of board where I would say whatever your state minimum is, that's how small your board should be, to begin with, for a startup. To really build out all the pieces, get everything in place, and then get into recruitment.

Caroline: One more about the executive director. Where did that one go? Oh, what's your opinion on having retired executives on the board, I guess, and is there a percent of the makeup of the total? I don't know how many retired executives you'd have.

Adriane: I am not sure how to answer that question, so I'm gonna kind of jump in and see. The people you recruit for your board have to be people who can contribute to the work that needs to be done at the time. So, when you think about your board matrix, and you think about what is the set of knowledge, skills, dispositions, all those things you need on your board, if it turns out there are a lot of retired executives who apply, who are interested, who you've talked to, then maybe that's your pool. But I can't imagine that subgroup by itself taking up a lot of space on a board unless it's because it comes as a result of a closed social network where they all know each other and recruit each other.

Caroline: Okay. Let's see, we're running out of time, I'll try to get a few more of these in here. What's your feelings on like a young professionals board as a sort of recruiting ground?

Adriane: I have a couple of...I don't know. I'm not entirely sure how I feel about it, truth be told. I feel like if you wanna make young professionals actively involved in learning about governance, it's probably, in my opinion, better to put them actually on a committee and teach them about the work of the organization, and then roll them onto your board.

But I think anytime you separate out a population into an advisory committee or a subgroup then, one, you're making more work for your executive director and your board to try to manage another group. But you're also suggesting that this particular subgroup isn't maybe ready, or qualified, or appropriate for the board, which would make it harder to really recruit from there. Because you'd have to invest in them, you'd have to do all the training. So I would say, put them on committees, create spots and recruit young professionals to be on your committees, and then prepare them for board service. Grow your own, so to speak.

Caroline: Okay, let's see. Can we get in one more question? Yes, we will be sending a replay, and a slide deck, and a handout that has a lot of this process outlined on it. Let's see, we can also send links for contacting you in case people have more questions coming up. Would you like to repeat your website or your contact information before we [inaudible 00:57:44]?

Adriane: standpointconsulting.com. And if you want to send an email, I'm just gonna put it in the box here, you can send it to talktous@standpointconsulting.com.

Caroline: talktous@standpointconsulting.com, I love that. And also boardable.com, you can find a lot of these like ebooks and things I've been putting in the chat area. There's some really good information there about outlining the board roles, what are... Let's see, we have another one. I think you would enjoy this the ED versus board chair, which a lot of people...there's a lot of questions on that one too. Well, I would like to thank you once again for joining us. This has been so informational.

Adriane: Thank you.

Caroline: I'm sure everybody in the chat area agrees there because of all these wonderful questions coming in. Are you available for following up if people have...?

Adriane: Yes, I am, so feel free to email me. Email the talk to us and it'll get funneled because I have associates who also specialize in some of these topics. But email there and we will certainly get back to you.

Caroline: All right. Thank you, everybody. Have a great rest of your week and we hope to see you next month for strategic planning. Bye, Adriane. Thanks.

Adriane: Bye.