

Recruiting Board Members: Questions and Tips

Identifying and recruiting prospective board members is a process. Ultimately, for each board member, your goal is to build a relationship that will be sustainable and productive. To get there, you have to get to know a potential candidate. And good questions are the best way to get to know anyone. Here are 20 questions about six key areas that matter for effective board service. Naturally, you don't need to ask every question. Choose those most appropriate for the person and the setting.

Passion

- How did you first get interested in our cause?
- What has moved you to stay interested?
- What else would you like to see our organization do to support (fill in with your focus)?

Time

- What takes up most of your time?
- How many hours in a month – approximately – would you have for board service?
- Are there months when you typically would have more or less time than others?
- What constraints on your time for board service would you anticipate?

Motivation

- What do you look for in an organization when you volunteer?
- What volunteer experiences (or previous board service) have you had that stand out, and why?
- If you've been disappointed in a volunteer experience, what was the reason?
- What interests you about the idea of board leadership in our organization?
- What would you hope to gain personally (and/or) professionally from board service?

Personality

- Our board tends to be (e.g., very social; pretty much all business; other descriptor of board's personality). How would you see yourself fitting into that environment?
- What types of interactions or relationships with other board members would be most important to you?
- Board members tend to have one of three roles: ambassador, advocate or asker. In which role would you most see yourself, and why?

Confidence

- Where do you feel you are in terms of knowing the responsibilities of board service?
- How would you feel about being required to have training in governance and other board member responsibilities?
- How would you feel about being evaluated for your performance as a board member?

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Recruiting Board Members: Questions and Tips *continued*

Finances

- Are you comfortable with the fact that board members are expected to make a financial commitment to the organization?
- Would be comfortable asking others to donate to the organization?

Tips on the Art of Questioning

- Draw on these questions during informal conversation with individuals you see as potential candidates and for more formal interviews with prospective members. Of course, apply common sense in choosing what to ask and when. Queries about passion and time are more appropriate for informal vetting than asking about personal finances.
- Naturally, change the wording of any question to fit your speaking style. You want the other person to be comfortable, so you need to be as well.
- When framing your own questions, aim for open-ended questions that invite candidates to explain their thinking – unless “yes” or “no” is all that’s needed.
- If you’re not clear about an answer, ask for clarification. Don’t fill in the blanks on your own.
- Pause to give candidates time to think and respond. Providing “wait time” is one secret to getting the information you need.
- Even if you’re acquainted with a candidate personally, don’t skip the questioning. You need to hear the person’s responses, not what you think he/she would say.
- Even if you’ve served on another board with a candidate, this is a different board. Ask from the current perspective.
- Keep in mind that there’s no such thing as too much information about a person’s attitudes, expectations and qualifications when it comes to board service.