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BOARD BUILDING: THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE'S ROLE

Creating a strong board requires many key ingredients, including the existence of a strong nominating committee. The executive committee sometimes fills the role of nominating board members for organizations that don't have multiple committees. In all cases, however, it is extremely important that the group charged with identifying, cultivating, and recruiting board members takes the time needed to engage in a thorough board building process. This issue of *Arts Insights* focuses on the nominating committee's role and addresses points to ponder as they relate to maintaining strong relationships in the community while enhancing an organization's ability to achieve greater impact through its board. We'll touch how to assess your existing board, where to find strong candidates, how to cultivate relationships, and ultimately how to make the official invitation to join the board.

IDENTIFY YOUR BOARD'S NEEDS

The first step in finding new board members is to take stock of your existing resources. Several organizations use basic tools such as a Mini Board Self-Assessment Survey to understand their internal strengths and weaknesses. Each board member is asked to self-assess how the board is doing in relation to the organization's mission, strategic planning, program evaluation, fundraising, fiscal oversight, and overall effectiveness. Additionally, consideration of the board's relationship with the chief executive, staff, and community at large are all important considerations that a board needs to address periodically. And finally, the board should assess its effectiveness in the selection and orientation of new and existing board members. Once this analysis is completed, the nominating or board development committee can review the results in order to more effectively understand the abilities of the existing board and determine what new resources will be needed to become more proficient in each of the areas above.

Additionally, many organizations use a Board Profile Worksheet in order objectively understand the expertise, skills and personal data that leads to a deeper knowledge of the strengths of board members individually while viewing them as a group. Some organizations use a simple chart that breaks their board down demographically and by their expertise, age, gender, race, resources, community connections, leadership qualities, and education among others. This allows the organization to understand what is missing from its mix of human talent. Are there people in your existing audience or donor base that have a passion for your organization and its mission? Is there a corporate entity that is interested in having a close affiliation with you?

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IDENTIFY YOUR PROSPECTS

With the analysis above completed and presented to the full board for discussion, the nominating committee can now move forward with a board consensus in identifying prospects. At this board presentation and at subsequent meetings, the nominating committee should periodically solicit prospect names from the entire board in order to keep them engaged in the process. There should never be a time where a new board member is being invited to join without the agreement of the board. Additionally, it is crucial for the committee to work closely with the staff in reviewing prospects from lists of long-time subscribers, individual donors, corporate donors' management, and others who they feel would be committed to the mission of the institution. Starting with those who are already closest to your organization will provide the highest likelihood for successful conversion of an individual prospect to one that will ultimately become a successful board member.

CULTIVATE YOUR PROSPECTS

Once you've found a pool of prospects that have been thoroughly reviewed by the nominating committee, those closest to the prospect will need to cultivate their interest. Keep in mind that this is still the "dating" phase of cultivating a board prospect. This is a delicate balance, as prospects haven't yet been elected to the board and should not be led to believe that this initial step is a "proposal." The dating phase is extremely critical in ensuring a positive image for the organization in the community. One tactic that many organizations use is to ask an individual to assist with identifying other board prospects. Typically this results in you explaining the roles and responsibilities of being on the board, so that they can then suggest friends who might be prospects. This exchange of information can also conclude with a general question as to whether the prospect themselves would have interest in serving on the board.

Cultivation is simply exploring a prospect's interest in order to report back to the nominating committee and board that a prospect is ready, willing, and able to serve. An additional technique is to speak about a prospect's interest in the organization in general, their involvement in other nonprofits in a board or volunteer capacity, and their personal and business connections. Other cultivation tools include inviting prospects to special behind-the-scenes events with artists, so that they can experience the culture of an organization. Lunches or private meetings with your organization's artistic and administrative leaders will also pique a prospect's interest. Ultimately, your prospective board members must know what you are about and experience the quality and culture of your organization to be thoroughly cultivated. Once a prospect expresses interest in the board, a resume or biography should be solicited.

As the dating phase is underway, the nominating committee should meet often to assess their prospects, compare their needs to the results of the assessment surveys, and prioritize their candidates based on the number of vacancies available. At this point, the individual being cultivated could view the situation as a solicitation for a contribution,

advice, board membership, or any number of other roles associated with your institution. The nominating committee should also always be tracking and maintaining records of those who are not ready now, but have the capacity to be effective board members in the future.

RECRUIT YOUR BOARD MEMBERS

Finally, it's time to make the invitation to recruit the prospect by asking them to serve on the board. This occurs after the nominating committee has presented its recommendation and candidate biographies to the full board, and the board concurs that a prospect should be invited to join the board. Meetings with the artistic and executive leadership must occur to ensure that all parties are ready for a fruitful working relationship. The prospective board member must also receive full disclosure on what is happening at the organization, including its performances, financial position, schedule of meetings, roles and responsibilities of board members, and any other details about board service and organizational direction. This is the crucial moment where expectations must be established, including outlining the board's policies on giving or raising funds. The prospect needs to feel comfortable with their decision, and the organization must know that the person is fully committed. Additionally, a follow-up written document should be sent or given that outlines the major financial and institutional policies that have been established by the board. In some instances, a board contract or agreement may be signed to ensure that commitment and responsibilities are clearly defined and agreed upon.

CONCLUSION

The nominating committee is an important part of the overall board building cycle. Once a board member has been recruited, there is more work to be done in orienting, engaging, educating and evaluating the effectiveness of the board and its members. But a commitment to a thorough recruitment process is the first step in developing a top-notch board.

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