

CHARITY MATTERS

Board Members



Recruiting board members for community, voluntary and charitable organisations is a difficult process due to time commitments, regulatory requirements, responsibilities and the vagaries of everyday life. It is fair to say that 20/30 years ago, board recruitment was friend-to friend and more casual in approach. Now the process is very professional with organisations such as The Wheel and Boardmatch Ireland offering training in board recruitment, education and retention in addition to training offered by private individuals.

A report by Irish Nonprofits Knowledge Exchange in January 2012 (most recent report available) showed that there were 52,429 board members serving on Irish nonprofit boards with many serving on more than one board. So why do so many people volunteer their time to sit on boards and take on such responsibility and what should these volunteers expect from the organisations in return?

For many people, being a board member means volunteering time and talent (and often financial support) to support an organisation they love. They see it as a civic duty to give back to society to help cultivate the next generation of nonprofit leaders which will help to ensure the sustainability of the sector in the long-term. They also volunteer because they want to help others and to impart valuable knowledge they have gained through their own professional and personal lives.

It is also important to recognise that there are positive career benefits associated with being a board member such as expanding your network; raising your professional profile; enhancing your group and project management skills and being a coach or mentor to the CEO and staff within the organisation. There is also the satisfaction of helping the organisation to grow and meet its goals & objectives. These are valuable assets that can support your own personal and professional goals and enable you to build lasting relationships whilst helping others at the same time.

So what should community, voluntary and charitable organisations offer a prospective board member in return for their support? Firstly, the initial approach must be professional and usually conducted by the Chairperson or an existing board member, plus the CEO. This should be followed by the completion of a board member application form to facilitate a deeper understanding of the individual involved and also discussion amongst the existing board members. In the course of follow up meetings (usually takes more than one meeting), there should be a sharing of information including the most recent set of financial accounts, current strategic plan and a recent newsletter or piece of communication. Specifically, they should know that they will receive training around their participation and responsibilities at board level.

Board members must be recruited because they bring a skillset that is needed such as financial management, HR, recruitment, fundraising, legal, marketing, PR etc and because they can play a valuable role in the future of your organisation. These are skills that are vital to long term success and should be secured through a well-thought and well-constructed board recruitment programme. Board members are happiest and at their most productive when sharing their knowledge and skills for the betterment of the organisation in addition to knowing exactly what is required of them.

If you are reading this as a prospective board member; consider what you want from the organisation and what you expect to do in return. If you are an existing board member; consider what can be done by your board as a collective unit to further the success of the organisation. If you are a CEO; look at your board and identify new ways to harness their talents and energies. Goals and objectives will be more readily achieved if time and energy is used wisely.



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