

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before Joining A Board

Serving on a board can be a rewarding experience, but is also time-intensive and demanding. Before joining a board, ask yourself the following questions to ensure that board service is right for you. If you are appointing new board members, be certain that you do not have any hesitations about your prospective board members' answers to the questions below.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ADVANCING A CAUSE YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT? WHAT TYPE OF VOLUNTEER WORK IS MOST FULFILLING FOR YOU?

You must be committed to the mission of an organization before deciding to join its board of directors. Boards can have a huge impact on an organization, but do not routinely take part in direct volunteering. (Start-up boards are an exception to this rule.) If you prefer a more hands-on volunteer opportunity, board service might not be the best way to get involved with an organization.

HOW MUCH TIME CAN YOU DEVOTE TO BOARD WORK?

Board members are legally required to fulfill their fiduciary duties, which will require a considerable time commitment. The amount of time varies by organization, but simply planning to attend meetings is not sufficient. Board members must review financial statements, meeting materials, and prepare for and attend committee meetings on a regular basis.

Serving on a committee before joining the full board can be a good way to learn more about the organization and prepare yourself for the amount of work participating on a board can entail.

ARE YOU ABLE AND WILLING TO ASSIST A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION WITH FUNDRAISING?

One of the primary responsibilities of the board is to ensure that the organization has adequate financial resources to carry out its mission. Many organizations require board members to make a personal contribution and/or solicit funds. Be prepared to make connections and introductions to donors, attend fundraising events, and send personal and thank you notes.

ARE YOU PATIENT AND COLLEGIAL WHEN WORKING AS A TEAM? ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF YOUR USUAL PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL CIRCLES?

Boards of directors must work together to build consensus and govern an organization. If you work better alone without input from a large group, board service may not be right for you. Additionally, the highest performing boards comprise a mix of professionals to bring a variety of viewpoints to a discussion. Expect board members to represent a number of different industries, backgrounds, and perspectives.

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DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF BEING A BOARD MEMBER?

Board members have a number of obligations — including those that are legally sanctioned — to an organization. To familiarize yourself with the responsibilities board service entails, take a look at our most popular publication, [Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards](#).

IS THERE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE ORGANIZATION?

Identify your role on the board. Do you bring financial expertise? Community connections? Before joining a board, ask yourself whether you feel that your work on the board will make a positive impact on the organization.

DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH THE OVERALL HEALTH OF THE ORGANIZATION?

Board members have a legal obligation to the organization they govern. If you are not confident the organization is being managed well, either by the chief executive or the current board members, and believe your association with the organization could put you at risk, it may be time to take a step back.