

Are you someone who is thinking about joining a nonprofit board? Start here first.

Starting your Nonprofit Board Journey: Finding the Right Fit for You

Joining a nonprofit board is one of many ways to grow more involved in the nonprofit sector. If you've made the decision to join the board of a nonprofit organization, you may be faced with this challenging question:

***“ How do I find
the right board? ”***

Finding a board that feels like the right fit isn't always so straightforward and while there's some trial and error to be expected, we've created a tool to help individuals determine board fit across three different categories.





Board Engagement

Board engagement refers to the activities that board members will be asked to partake in that will help board members build rapport with one another and work towards the mission of the organization. This category may be important as you try to gauge how much time you have to commit time towards joining a board.



Board members are regularly engaged in the day-to-day and/or long-term planning

An organization with this board structure may offer many opportunities to learn a lot about board leadership. You can grow a lot more well-versed in board leadership because you will be engaged in a very hands-on way.

Board members are tapped on a consistent or periodic basis

This may be a fairly organized nonprofit board where responsibilities are clearly outlined which will help new board members grow up to speed quickly on board member expectations.

Board members are tapped infrequently

This may be characteristic of more long-standing boards. They may have more resources and therefore, they may require fewer touch points with board members. You may be able to learn a lot from joining more established nonprofit boards.

Pros

Cons

This type of board may require a lot more of an upfront investment in your time. You will need to make sure that you have the time to commit to joining a board that will require more board support and leadership.

There may be an established way of doing things with board members and as a result, there may be little desire to change board habits. If you are seeking more involvement, in the day-to-day of the organization or the board, you may have to be proactive in expressing and implementing a plan.

There may be a less hands-on culture in boards like this. As a result, there may also be fewer opportunities to connect with other board members or feel attuned to the mission of the organization. You may have to work closely with the Board Chair and the Executive Director of the organization to establish other touch points.



Financial Commitment *or Give / Get*

Nonprofit organizations will often ask their board members to make a financial contribution during their board term; this is also known as a give/get. Fulfilling a board's give/get is one way that board members can ensure that a nonprofit organization has adequate resources to advance its mission.

Pros

Cons

Give/Get policy is clearly outlined and shared with board members

Having this information in advance may give you plenty of time to raise money towards the give/get.

Because this policy may be fixed, there may not be a lot of wiggle room to change the give/get policy.

Give/Get policy is flexible

If you may not be able to meet the give/get, there may be an openness to creating a plan that leans on your other strengths. The board culture here may be flexible and adaptable in this way.

You may have to spend more time thinking through other resources you can tap to fulfill your give/get.

Give/Get policy is absent

Board Members may be able to provide input in shaping the financial ask of board members. This may be a relatively new board that is open to establishing a new policy.

There may be other areas related to board policies and procedures that may also require input from board members. You will want to ensure that you have time to commit to this endeavor and that you are also tapping the right resources to help you establish effective policies for the board.





Financial & Legal Policies

Board members are responsible for ensuring that an organization has sound and ethical, legal governance and financial management policies. Sometimes, board members may even be responsible for laying the foundation for creating board policies.



Policies exist and are regularly audited by the board

You may be able to learn a lot more about how successful board policies work because of the groundwork that has been laid.

If you are seeking to build an expertise in establishing and executing board policies, it may be harder to do this within an organization that has already laid the groundwork for this. Tapping the expertise of existing board members, may help you understand a bit more about board policies.

Policies exist but there may be other gaps in putting these policies into practice

The board may simply require a change in habits and more structure around how policies are implemented and followed. A complete overhaul of the board's policies may not be necessary. Revisiting roles and responsibilities may be an important area that can serve as a fix here.

You may need to put a bit more time into changing habits and redefining board roles. This takes time and requires consistency.

Policies may exist in a very basic way (e.g., as it appears in the bylaws or articles of incorporation)

The organization already has a foundation for its policies that have allowed it to secure its 501(c)(3) status.

Policies may not have been revisited in a long time. They may need to be overhauled or amended and this may require an external facilitator and additional insights and time from board members.

Pros

Cons

Questions to Ask Yourself as You Consider Joining a Board

- 1 What types of causes or organizations would you like to support?
- 2 What skills or experiences can you bring to a board?
- 3 How will you define success as a board member?
- 4 Does your definition of success as a board member match that of the board you would like to join?
- 5 What financial contribution (if at all) do you feel comfortable making?
- 6 Have you connected with other board members within the organizations you are thinking about joining?
- 7 How have existing board members adjusted to the needs of the organization you are thinking about joining?