

## **What Should I Ask Before Accepting a Board Seat?**

### **Questions Prospective Board Members Should Ask**

*(or, "What the Nominating Committee Should Tell Candidates")*

Being elected or appointed to serve on a Board of Directors is one of the most challenging and rewarding of volunteer assignments. While it is usually considered an honor, board members have important legal and fiduciary responsibilities that will require a commitment of time, skills, and resources.

You should be able to find most answers to your questions from the board member or committee that asked you about serving, or from the executive officers, former board members or the staff. Written documents should be available to answer nearly all your concerns and questions. The following is adapted from the National Center for Nonprofit Boards.

- Ask about the organization's plans and programs.
  - What is the organization's mission?
  - How do current goals and activities relate to the overall mission?
  - Can I visit the organization's board meetings or office to observe?
  - Does the organization have a strategic plan? How often is it evaluated and revised?
  
- Ask about the organization's financial status
  - Is the financial condition of the organization sound?
  - Does the board discuss and approve the annual budget?
  - How often do board members receive financial reports?
  
- Ask about the organization's clients or constituencies
  - Whom does the organization serve?
  - Are the organization's members or constituencies satisfied with the organization?
  - How often does the organization survey the members?
  
- Ask about the structure of the board
  - How is the board structured?
  - Do descriptions of the responsibilities of the board as a whole and of individual board members exist?
  - Who are the other board members?
  - Does the organization have directors and officers (D&O) liability insurance?
  
- Ask about individual board members' responsibilities
  - What are the ways that you think I can contribute as a board member?
  - How much of my time will be required for meetings and special events?
  - Is there an annual calendar available of meetings and events?
  - How are committee assignments made?
  - What orientation will I receive to the organization and to the responsibilities of board service?
  - What does the organization offer for board development and training?
  - What is the board's role in fund-raising?
  - Will I be expected to make annual financial contributions to the organization, foundation or other events?
  - What role will I play in soliciting money?
  
- Ask about the board's relationship to the staff
  - Is the board satisfied with the performance of the staff and/or consultants?
  - How do board members and staff typically work with each other?

- Is there a general counsel to advise the board?

Prospective board members can do themselves and the organization a service by asking some basic questions before joining an organization's board. This will also show the nominating committee, staff and others how serious you are about the opportunity to serve.

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