

How can I get on a nonprofit board?

Tips to improve your chances of joining a nonprofit board, in particular, one of the higher education or healthcare (eds and meds) boards

The following suggestions apply to recruitment to any nonprofit board:

1. Know your passions- essential for a good fit and the key to staying engaged.
 - Women and families? Young women? Maternal and child health? Healthcare? Education? Arts?
2. Research what organizations/institutions are engaged in your areas of interest/expertise.
3. Do your due diligence: go online and research the mission and messaging of a given organization, as well as their financial stability, governance and makeup of their board.
 - How do you compare to the current board members in terms of your skills, background and level of experience?
 - What do you have to offer that the board lacks and might value?
4. Position yourself; know clearly what you bring to the table and what distinguishes you from others with some similar credentials.
 - Expertise, experience, contacts, money, philanthropic reach, community or political connections.
5. Make sure your resume is polished, concise and in an appropriate board format.
 - There are many organizations or individual consultants, as well as written resources, to help you develop a good board bio.
6. Understand the financial expectations of a given non-profit.
 - Are you expected to make a specified financial contribution or raise a particular amount of money?
 - Are the expectations flexible?

7. Make sure you are comfortable with board term requirements, meeting times, frequency and location.
 - Are they compatible with your personal and professional life?

8. Network- relationship building is key; leadership tends to advance people they know or candidates who are recommended by people they know; few nonprofits use search firms for recruiting board members.
 - Contact board members you know or high-level staff members and tell them you are interested in possible board membership.
 - Think about where you work – whom do you know in leadership who could go to bat for you, or who might have a connection with members of the board in question?
 - Contact the Chair of the Nominating or Board Development Committee if you have no personal contacts.

9. Ask about board committees and/or volunteer to join a committee.
 - This is an excellent way to gain entry, equip you with the knowledge and expectations of a board without the financial commitment, and become known to the organization’s leaders.

Suggestions for the nonprofit “eds and meds”

Recognize that these are the largest, most powerful and influential of the nonprofit boards and being part of the leadership of such organizations is comparable to being part of the leadership of a large for-profit corporation.

You don’t become a plausible candidate overnight, without prior board experience and a high level of experience and expertise that might also qualify you to be on a corporate board.

You might want to attend a program, local or national, that prepares people for service on major boards. There are various programs targeting women and people of color; some are offered by organizations, others are offered by consultants.

Note: many colleges and universities draw on alumni/ae for board candidates and some alumni/ae associations can nominate candidates. So a promising path to board service can be becoming active in your alumni/ae association.