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Board Engagement

Bringing on a terrific board member is only the first step. Taking time to ensure that each board member becomes personally invested and engaged in the mission of the organization is time well spent. When truly engaged, board members will become your nonprofit's best ambassadors, advocates, strategists, and all-around supporters.

An engaged board is a forward-thinking board that strives for a collaborative partnership with the CEO/executive director. Engaged boards “work” between board meetings and attend meetings well prepared. They are willing to deliberate candidly, confidently treading on sensitive topics that may result in “messy” discussions because they trust one another and are comfortable with the culture of the nonprofit, confident that everyone values mutual respect. They partner for fundraising as well as [advocacy](#).

The new engagement is distinguished by board deliberations that are future-oriented, proactive, and based on trust."

- Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

Practice Pointers

- Assign new board members a “board buddy” to serve as a mentor for the first few meetings.
- Use name tags or screen names during meetings so that new board members can get to know their colleagues easily.
- Include a bio of all board members in the board orientation materials.
- If there is a statement of values or code of conduct that the nonprofit has adopted, be sure to share that also.
- Help new board members get up to speed by sharing minutes from the prior year’s board meetings, highlighting any important corporate actions taken. However, rather than expecting them to read the materials, sitting down with a few of their colleagues who are willing to summarize the past year’s activities is more personal and can start building bonds.
- Introduce topics that the board has to wrestle with to foster engagement and build trust. Use our [Tip Sheet for Candid Conversations](#).
- Finding the right committee for each new board member can be helpful to ensure early engagement. Some people join boards to share their professional expertise with the nonprofit. Others want to do something completely different as a volunteer from what they do in their everyday job.
- Structure board meeting agendas around important questions that the nonprofit needs to answer and strategic priorities so that the board is continually being asked to think about the future and see the “big picture.” One of our favorite ideas is to divide the agenda into three sections to stimulate thinking: “hindsight, foresight, and insight.”
- Board members feel more engaged when they are confident they know both the mission and what it takes to advance it.
- Ask all board members to fill-out a [self-assessment](#) periodically to gauge engagement.
- Have a conversation with your board about their role as advocates. Use the Stand for Your Mission [Discussion Guide](#) (BoardSource)

Additional Resources

- [What to do with board members who don’t do anything](#) (Blue Avocado)
- [Why board engagement in advocacy is essential](#) (Nonprofit Quarterly)
- [Nonprofit Board and Leadership Development Strategies](#) (Nonprofit Quarterly)

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