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Standing Beside Alaska's Nonprofits

Board Recruitment Matrix – A Guide

Derived from Strategic Plan Goals

Disclaimer: *This document is not intended as legal advice. Your organizational goals, purpose, bylaws, and values should drive the creation of this document.*

This example can be used in a variety of ways to help the board via the board development committee to recruit "the right people at the right time" on purpose for board service.

A matrix is not simply a generic listing of characteristics, styles, backgrounds, etc., it is about being specific and aligned to the core purpose and values of the organization as well as clarifying what critical actions of the board need to be addressed by board members based on the strategic and operating plans. It is also based on the constellation of skills, attributes, lived experiences, and demographics that it will take to make a high-performing board team ready to take on the strategic work of board service. Ultimately, recruitment should result in a diverse mix of board members who together provide the wisdom and work to steward the organization's goals toward excellence and mission impact.

A board matrix is not a one-size document. It can be used for one of three things:

1. To maintain the status quo
2. As a boundary spanner tool to help your mission connect to the people, groups, geography, etc., and to bring more meaning and lived experiences into decision-making
3. As a purposeful creative disruptor tool

If you use the same matrix that you have always used, you will get exactly what you have – the status quo. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it may prove frustrating for those who want to see a change, for example in diversity. Many organizations don't want the status quo. They want to recruit people who will take them into the future, not keep them where they are. Be "on purpose" in your choices and your process. A board matrix has many advantages including the ability to recruit beyond the "usual prospects." To read more about the advantages and cautionary notes of the board matrix and the three ways to focus its use, check out our blog post: Rethinking the Board Recruitment Matrix.

While there are many steps to working a matrix, the aim is to get beyond a person picking another person, or any other haphazard process that too often becomes the norm. Commit to all the steps listed in the next section.

Who does this work?

These steps refer to a board development committee. You can find a job description for this committee on the Resources page of our website. The responsibility for this activity rests primarily

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with the committee and the board as a whole. We understand that the executive is likely to be involved but ideally should not lead or be the sole instigator or implementor. Every team is different in staffing and committee structure – lean into the team's strengths to do this work.

The matrix is one part of a larger plan

The steps assume that the board matrix is part of a larger **Board Succession Plan**. If you are new to that document, reach out to us for information on how to create a holistic plan that focuses on strategic recruitment, thoughtful engagement, and graceful exit of board members.

Creating the matrix

1. **Set the matrix in context**
    - Use your bylaws, strategic plan, core purpose, core values, and an accurate board job description as references through the process to ensure your tools are made just for you.
2. **Decide the intent of the matrix**
    - Do you need it to promote the status quo, as a boundary spanner, or as a creative disruptor?
3. **Brainstorm with your team**
    - In a format that works best for your board, brainstorm all the backgrounds and experiences, skills and talents, interpersonal characteristics and work styles, access to constituencies, and personal demographics that are needed in the board room over the next 3-5 years to meet the goals of board service.
    - Be as specific as possible. For example, if one of the goals is to raise more charitable money, think about the kind of person who will be most helpful. Do you need someone with access to a new set of stakeholders? Or someone who has experience raising money from individuals? Or someone who has corporate contacts? Or someone who is detail-oriented and can write and manage a plan or the data associated with donor cultivation and stewardship? Or someone who is a visionary. Or perhaps you just need someone who can get things done. Being specific on the front end helps you both understand the gaps in your constellation and ways to be specific in your requests of others.
4. **Prioritize the attributes**
    - Using your larger brainstormed list and your intended goal of status quo, boundary spanner, or creative disruptor, narrow down your list to the key elements that are needed in the board room over the next few years.
5. **Define a few key questions or statements**
    - These should reflect the organization's goals for the next three years to help you focus on the right characteristics at the right time.

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- An example can be a checkbox indicating that the person has an existing relationship to the mission in some form or that they agree to be nonpartisan in their work as a board member.

6. Write it down

- Take the list from steps 3 and 4 and write them in the matrix noting one attribute per cell.
- Your list will likely include:
    - Specific skills and talents
    - Access to stakeholders – "boundary spanners"
    - Diverse backgrounds, lived experiences, and demographics
    - Necessary inter-personal characteristics and work styles
    - A few key questions or statements to reflect the organization's goals

7. Understand your starting point

- List your existing board members on the top row.
- Ask board members to fill in where they "fit" by placing an "x" in the appropriate box(es). This can be done as a group, through a survey, or through other individualized approaches that work best for you to manage the data.

8. Compile the answers and create a summary

- Look at the strengths of the team and define the gaps indicated as "blank boxes."
- Engage the board development committee and the full board and executive in a conversation about the summary findings.
    - Remember you are not looking at a single "blank box" but rather a composite of what those gaps say about your focus for recruitment. The boxes left without a mark collectively represent the assets of the person the board is seeking.

9. Populate with prospects

- Once you reach alignment within the team on how to move toward – status quo, boundary spanner, or creative disruptor – the board development committee can lead the full board and the executive can lead the staff in a brainstorming process to identify specific individuals who fit the desired result outlined in the matrix.
    - Brainstorming can be done in person or through an electronic survey or some form of nomination process. Ideally, each person's suggestions fit at least two qualities beyond any demographic criteria, and all of them are devoted to the core purpose and values.

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10. Live the results

- The board development committee can then actively recruit board prospects.

11. Regularly and consistently update the matrix

- As the board faces turnover and/or sets new goals, the matrix should be updated for accuracy and relevance.

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Sample Brainstorming Template to Capture Criteria for Board Composition

Derived from the bylaws, strategic plan, core purpose, core values, and board job description

Backgrounds and lived experiences *(Examples: connection to mission or past board service tenure)*

_____

_____

Skills and Talents *(Examples: areas of professional expertise, potential/current board committee interests, specific skills needed to get the work done -- like fundraising willingness)*

_____

_____

Interpersonal characteristics and work styles *(Examples: strategic thinker, doer, linear thinker, process thinker, leader, goal driven, team player, sound judgment, sense of humor, entrepreneurial, sound problem solver, ability to manage conflict)*

_____

_____

Access to constituencies *(Examples: government decision-makers, faith communities, civic/social groups, ethnic communities, and other nonprofit allies)*

_____

_____

Purposeful demographics *(Examples: age range, gender, race and ethnicity, geography, ability)*

_____

_____

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Sample Matrix Form

Intended Purpose (pick one)

- ☐ **To maintain the status quo**
- ☐ **As a boundary spanner tool** to help your mission connect to the people, groups, and geography, etc. and to bring more meaning and lived experiences into decision-making
- ☐ **As a purposeful creative disruptor tool**

(Note that this format is typically maintained in an Excel spreadsheet for easier sorting and tabulating)

	Current Board Members									**Board Prospects**					
Attributes															

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