

Self-Assessment Checklist for Prospective Board Members – Example

Disclaimer: This tool is not intended as legal advice. The suggestions are meant as guidelines only.

Notes: Board service should feel mutually beneficial – good for the potential board member, good for the existing board team, and good for the mission. Encouraging potential board members to consider their readiness for service can often result in helpful conversations before a person joins the team. This checklist offers some options for consideration by prospective board members. Each organization should add considerations that align with the organization's culture and responsibilities.

Research to do before you join a board

Why you?

- Do you align with the mission, purpose, and values of the organization? *(If no, stop the process)*
- Do you align with the goals in the existing strategic plan? *(If no, stop the process)*
- Determine why you were asked to join the board. Do you have specific expertise, ability, or other talents, lived experience, background, etc. that make you an attractive board member? Do those reasons make sense to you and feel good?
- Do you feel comfortable with how the organization communicates its mission, purpose, values, programs, and use of funding? Is there a venue to ask your questions with confidence?
- Does board recruitment and engagement feel strategic? Is there an active board development committee?
- _____ What else do you want to ask?

Overall responsibilities:

- Ask for a written list of board duties (aka board job description) and meeting dates. How many meetings are you expected to attend? How many committees will you be expected to serve on, and how often do those committees meet?
- Does the organization provide board training or are you expected to learn on the job or on your own?
- Review the current list of board members. Can you connect with one or more of them before committing to board service? If yes, do you feel confident that this is a team that both enjoys its work and accomplishes its goals?
- Is there a way to understand the performance results of the organization (formally through a Theory of Change and Dashboard or informally through conversation)?
- Can you review the minutes of recent meetings or hear a list of current topics that are on the docket? Are you excited about those conversations?
- _____ What else do you want to ask?

Financial Stewardship

- Is there an active board finance committee?
- Do you have any concerns after reading the board's audited or year-end financial statements? Is there a venue to ask these questions with confidence?
- Ask how the organization funds its operations. Does it rely on government grants/contracts/reimbursements, individual donations, fees for services, membership fees, or other revenue? Are you comfortable with your board role in raising revenue and stewarding the resources? Can you get specifics about those expectations before joining the board?
- Ask how the organization manages reserves. If it has an endowment, ask to see the most recent investment returns. Is the organization in financially good standing? Are there ample short and long-term resources that create resiliency for the mission?
- _____ What else do you want to ask?

Board-CEO Partnership

- If there is a CEO/Executive Director, can you talk with them before committing to board service? Do you feel a sense of rapport with this person and their leadership style?
- _____ What else do you want to ask?

Legal stewardship

- Check Guidestar (www.guidestar.org) to review the organization's latest Form 990. Does this information correlate with information presented in the annual report or other published materials?
- Check for state filing compliance. Is the organization up to date?
- Ask if there is board D&O coverage and its limits, along with other insurance covering mission activities
- _____ What else do you want to ask?

Personal Checklist for Board Service (if you can not say “yes” then consider if this is the right board for you right now)

- Will you attend the board’s annual workshop and/or training session including strategic and annual planning?
- Will you attend at least 80% of the scheduled board meetings?
- Will you serve on at least one committee during the year?
- Will you participate in the public-facing activities and events as a board member?
- Will you make an annual meaningful charitable donation to the organization if that is part of the organization’s culture and expectations?
- Will you take the time to understand the organization’s budget and financial statements so you can ask strategic questions and be a thoughtful steward for the organization?
- Will you be a willing participant in helping to secure resources for the organization based on your strengths?
- Will you work closely with the board to make strategic decisions?
- Will you partner appropriately with the CEO/Executive Director?
- Will you sign a conflict of interest and confidentiality statement (as provided by the organization) to put the interests of the organization above personal interests and to reveal any conflicts of interests in matters put before the board?
- Are you looking forward to spending your time advancing this mission?
- Will you participate in a fair annual CEO/Executive Director evaluation process that supports the leader, improves the board relationship, and advances the mission?
- Will you participate in assessing CEO/Executive Director compensation to ensure alignment with the market and, as appropriate, review and approve the overall compensation philosophy?
- Will you participate (as requested) with the board in a review and update of the organization’s policies and ensure values alignment?