

Self-Assessment for Prospective Board Members – A Checklist

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

Board service should be mutually beneficial—adding value for the potential board member, the existing board, and the organization’s mission. Encouraging prospective members to reflect on their readiness for service can lead to valuable conversations before they join the team. This checklist provides considerations for individuals exploring board membership. Each organization is encouraged to adapt and expand these items to reflect its unique culture, expectations, and responsibilities.

Researching the organization and the position before you join the board

Consider the following questions. Will your research provide adequate answers and enable you to feel comfortable with your decision to join the board?

Why would you be a good fit for the board and the board a good fit for 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)*
- Why were you were asked to join the board? Do you have specific expertise, abilities, talents, experience, or background 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 an opportunity to ask your questions?
- Does board recruitment and engagement feel strategic? Is there an active board development committee?
- What else do you want to ask?*

What are the overall responsibilities for board service with this organization? How can you learn more?

- 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 offer board training, or will you be expected to learn as you go, 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 team 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 on the docket? Are you excited about those conversations?
- What else do you want to ask?*

Does the organization demonstrate effective 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 an opportunity to ask questions?
- How does the organization fund 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?*

Does the board partner effectively with the CEO or Executive Director?

- 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?*

Does the organization practice sound 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?
- Does the board have Directors and Officers (D&O) insurance? What is the coverage and its limits? Does the organization carry other insurance to cover mission activities?
- What else do you want to ask?*

A Personal Checklist for Board Service

If you cannot say “yes” to each of these, 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?