**What is a Highly Effective Nonprofit Board Member?**

A nonprofit board strives to select the best individual candidates for its membership. As talented as board members may be individually, the true strength of an effective board of directors lies in how well they work together. For this reason, it’s important for nonprofit board directors to view potential board candidates for what they bring to the board table individually, as well as how they participate in board discussions and help make decisions as a part of the whole.

[Trust](https://aicd.companydirectors.com.au/membership/company-director-magazine/2018-back-editions/august/edelman-trust) and confidence are two essential elements of high-performing nonprofit boards. Well-composed nonprofit boards generate synergistic energy where the sum of the parts is greater than the whole. Skills, expertise and professionalism are necessary ingredients for strong boards while board dynamics and good chemistry among members go a long way toward developing an effective board.

Five Qualities of an Effective Board of Directors

Qualities that contribute to positive organizational culture and leadership are important to building an effective board team. In choosing effective board directors, nominating committees may want to prioritize the qualities that candidates can bring to the board individually, and then consider how they will function as a part of the whole team.

When taken together, the following five qualities will combine to reflect a hard-working, progressive and productive board.

1. *Mix of Experience*

It’s not necessary for every board member of a nonprofit board to have board [experience.](https://www.causevox.com/blog/the-7-traits-of-ideal-board-members/) At the same time, it is important to have at least a few members who have served on other boards. While nonprofit boards don’t have as many regulations to follow as corporate boards, they do have to tend to some administrative duties. Nonprofit board directors have fiduciary duties, and they can be held personally liable for not being diligent about fulfilling them. It’s essential for nonprofit boards to have at least a few board directors who understand legal, financial and basic governance matters in order to ensure that the organization is in legal compliance.

Experienced members can educate and mentor less-experienced board directors so that institutional knowledge and experience remains on the board during periods of turnover. The presence of board directors who have known governance experience gives the whole board credibility, which is especially important for nonprofit boards that rely primarily on fundraising as their main source of financial support.

1. *Deep Interest in and Passion for the Mission*

What nonprofit board members lack in knowledge and expertise, they can often make up in [passion for the mission](https://bloomerang.co/blog/8-characteristics-of-an-outstanding-board-member/). Having a deep interest in the mission causes board members to be highly invested in their work, which makes them a valuable part of the board. This enthusiasm is often contagious, and their excitement over the board’s work tends to ignite passion for the mission in others.

A sense of fulfillment provides the motivation to help the board achieve its goals. Board member candidates who have served on boards, or who have worked with organizations that have similar causes, may find it easier to connect emotionally with an organization with a similar mission.

1. *Strong Commitment of Time and Energy*

Many people go into nonprofit work without really appreciating how much time and energy it takes to be an effective board member. When recruiting board members, it’s best to be clear that they’re expected to spend time preparing for board meetings, to attend board meetings faithfully, to join a committee and give it the same amount of attention, and to participate in other events.

In addition to donating their time, nonprofit board recruits should be independent enough to respectfully offer a dissenting opinion and support their stance even if they’re in the minority, yet be prepared to fully accept all board decisions as their own.

Boards work best as a whole when everyone participates in discussions, communicating their ideas respectfully and clearly. Highly effective boards discourage groupthink and work well as a team.

1. *Commitment to Giving*

Serving on a nonprofit board requires having a sense of stewardship. Some boards ask their board members to make personal financial donations to the organizations. Not every board member will be in a position to make a major gift but personal donations of any size that contribute to 100% board participation in fundraising are considered by some organizations and funders to be important.

For other organizations, making a personal financial contribution may not be part of the culture of the community served. Understanding the culture norms, expectations and wishes of the community the board serves is critical in decisions about asking members to contribute financially. On some boards, members may choose to make in-kind donations of time or talents in lieu of or in addition to financial giving.

Overall, it’s important for nonprofit board members to have a high level of integrity in serving others. As stewards of the organization’s funds, nonprofit boards serve the interests of the public and other intended beneficiaries. Boards that work together with these goals in mind can make a huge difference to better the lives of the citizens in their communities.

1. *Vision and Leadership*

The vision, mission and values are things that nonprofit board members need to be talking about regularly. It is these areas that motivate and inspire a board to be forward-thinking and proactive.

Working as a unit, nonprofit boards need to be alert to problems such as troubles with finances, employees, operations and legal problems. When any one board director suspects signs of trouble, the whole board must be willing to unite to resolve the issues.

As organizations grow, problems are bound to arise. Nonprofit boards need to possess a degree of toughness. Rather than shying away from problems and challenges, the board needs to be willing to tackle them together and to work through conflicts with confidence.

Nonprofit boards need to keep the [big picture](https://www.networkforgood.com/nonprofitblog/5-traits-great-board-members/) in mind as they deal with the many details of running a nonprofit. All board members must have the courage to bring forth new ideas and be willing to take the initiative on new projects and programs.

*Adapted from “What are the Qualities of an Effective Nonprofit Board?” by Nick Price, BoardEffect. March 2019*