



Fact Sheet: Best Practices in Board Recruitment

November 2021

Board recruitment for a community Foundation is a fundamental process that must be undertaken to ensure that the vision and mission are adhered to, that the assets of the Foundation are protected and used appropriately, and that the reputation of the Foundation is upheld.

Too often we read about Boards that have caused problems either through inappropriate oversight, inexperience or dysfunction which has led to a loss of reputation for these organizations. To read more go to [True Tales of Dysfunctional Boards](#).

So, what can a community Foundation do to ensure that its Board has the appropriate skills, attributes and knowledge to effectively lead their organization? What can the Foundation do to ensure that the Board is reflective of their community? This document describes a process that demonstrates how the right Board recruitment, orientation and training can mitigate some of the problems described above.

This process includes:

- *Knowing What You Don't Know*: why undertaking an annual Board evaluation will identify knowledge gaps
- *Getting Everyone on the Same Page*: speaks to the importance of ongoing Board education and professional development
- *Identifying Gaps*: how a Board matrix can identify the skills and attributes you need on your Board
- *Getting the Right People on the Bus*: ensuring that you have a relevant recruitment process that reflects your community and aligns with the skills needed around the Board table
- *Starting Off On The Right Track*: how new Board member orientation starts during the recruitment process and continues throughout their first year



What's important to know is that this process is ongoing. Just when you think that you've finished recruiting the best new directors, you need to start the process again within 6 months of them joining your Board.

Knowing What You Don't Know

How do Board members know what they don't know? One of the best ways to determine this is through an annual Board evaluation. [Dalhousie University Board Evaluation Questionnaire](#) is a great document for this purpose. This is a self-evaluation tool and evaluates five areas, including:

- A. How well the Board has done its job?
- B. How well the Board has conducted itself?
- C. Board's relationship with the Executive Director/CEO
- D. My performance as a Board member
- E. Feedback to the Chair of the Board

The Board needs to develop a process to secure and tally responses to the questions in each section and if there is a way that this can be done anonymously, Board members will be more honest in their responses. The average of each question's response will help the Board know what it doesn't know.

Boards may want to split the results between newly recruited Board members and those who have been on the Board for at least a year. By segregating the results, the Board will understand what more needs to be done with respect to the orientation of new directors.

Some Boards do a [Board Meeting Self-Evaluation](#) at the end of each Board meeting. This provides an ongoing mechanism to identify potential challenges, improve performance and identify governance knowledge gaps that could be used to inform future Board PD opportunities.

Getting Everyone on the Same Page

To improve knowledge going forward, identify topics where the average score on individual questions in the evaluation was low (3 or less). Share these topics with the Board and discuss what needs to be put in place to improve the results. Some of the improvements may relate to communication and knowledge. In light of this, many Boards have set up an annual schedule for Board professional development based on the results. This will ensure that all Directors have the same level of knowledge when making informed decisions while fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. Then when the evaluation is conducted the following year, the results can be compared to the previous year and, with a good PD program, there should be an increased level of knowledge.



Identifying Gaps

Many Foundations have created a Board Matrix that identifies the skills and attributes needed on their Board. These should be reviewed after each new strategic plan is approved by the Board and should align with those skills and attributes needed to ensure effective Board oversight. They should also be reflective of the ethnocultural characteristics of your community. When the Board starts its recruitment process, the matrix should be completed by each director where they note their level of knowledge, skills, experience and interest in each of the identified areas (i.e., advanced, good, fair, none). The results would then be entered into a master matrix. In this way, any gaps will be identified and help to inform the Board recruitment process.

Here is a selection of skills, experience and attributes used by community Foundations:

- Community in which you live (important for Foundations covering multiple municipalities or regions)
- Strategic thinker
- Visionary thinker
- Human resource knowledge
- Board and governance experience
- Understand philanthropy
- Identify as BIPOC (black, indigenous, person of colour)
- Ethnocultural background
- Gender
- Age range (specify under 35, 36-50, 51-65 over 65)
- Investment knowledge
- Financial knowledge
- Legal knowledge
- Policy development experience
- Marketing and communications experience
- Political acumen
- Strategic planning knowledge
- Risk management awareness
- Ties to the business community

With respect to ensuring that the Board is reflective of the diversity within your community, Board Source has an excellent publication entitled [Taking Action on Board Diversity](#). This document includes a series of questions, the answers to which will help boards articulate their values regarding the importance of diversity, and then put them into practice not only on the board but throughout their foundation.



Getting the Right People on the Bus

What we're talking about here is the recruitment process. This is a function of either the Nominating or Governance Committee and regardless of which committee is involved, completing a current Board Matrix is the first step in the process.

The recruitment process should be set up so that there will be enough time to complete the matrix, identify the gaps, identify and prioritize potential candidates, interview potential candidates and submit the list of recommended candidates at the Foundation's Annual General Meeting (AGM). This is not a task that can be undertaken the month before the AGM. In fact, it is important to refer to the Foundation's Bylaw which may stipulate the timing of reports to be presented at the AGM and, in some cases, the composition of the Nominating Committee and other factors influencing the Board recruitment process. Given the extent of what is involved in the recruitment process, starting four months prior to the AGM makes the most sense.

So how does one identify candidates who would fill the identified gaps?

Some Foundations place advertisements in their local paper and through their social media identifying the skills and attributes needed along with a link to an application form. Many Foundations recruit Board members from the members of their committees, to ensure that these volunteers are made aware of the opportunity to join the Board.

A well-known community leader, while a great addition to your board, may not have the time to commit to your organization. Candidates who can make a commitment will serve you better than a person who wants to help but is too busy to come to meetings or follow-up on action items.

Think about compiling names of potential candidates and the skills they offer well in advance of when the recruitment process actually starts – almost like a bank of potential directors. This will give plenty of time to consider individual skills and contributions.

Think about potential conflicts of interest. Candidates who have connections in the area of your group's interests are ideal, but not if it means you will always be competing for the same donors or funders. It is unfair to ask someone to sit on your board if the potential exists for him or her to be in a conflict of interest with another organization for which they volunteer or work.

Diversity is key. A room full of people with similar backgrounds, education and careers may come up with great ideas but you can rest assured those ideas will all be similar. Engaging people with different education, careers, connections, and life experiences will make for a lively board with varying opinions where the best ideas will flourish.



An application form is one way of gathering information on potential board members. An example used by the Community Foundation of Northwestern Alberta is included in Appendix C.

So, what's the next step? From your list of potential candidates prioritize them based on how their skills and attributes relate to the identified gaps. This is where the timing gets tricky. If you have 3 vacancies as you want to interview your top three candidates inviting them to join the Board and getting their answers before interviewing the next group. It would be very embarrassing if a candidate further down the list says yes and you have filled all the vacancies with other candidates.

When you interview potential members, provide them with materials and information that will help with their decision-making. These could include copies of a:

- recent annual report
- recent financial statements
- current year budget
- board policy on roles and responsibilities of directors
- schedule of Board meetings, plus
- an organization chart.

Be honest about the commitment. Be upfront about how much time and work commitment will be required. Board members will not be appreciative if they are told there will be little commitment but are subsequently asked to serve on numerous committees. Appendix A has a document that refers to what the commitment is as a Board member and what they can, in turn, expect in the way of support and knowledge from the Foundation. You may want to include this document with the other materials

If a member of your Board knows a potential candidate, they should be the Foundation's representative inviting them to and participating in a meeting inviting them to consider joining your Board. The Executive Director/CEO should also participate in this meeting.

Rarely do people make their decision during the meeting. If this is not the case, let the candidate know that they will be contacted within a week to get their response to the invitation. Also, provide them with contact information should they have any questions in the interim.

Once the committee has confirmed the slate of candidates, prepare a report summarizing the name and background of each for presentation at the Annual General Meeting. Once they have been elected to the Board, this is a wonderful opportunity to make an announcement to the community and to update the Foundation's website.



Starting Off On The Right Track

The orientation of new directors actually started with the information that was shared with them during the recruitment process. There is a great example of an orientation checklist for new directors in Appendix B. What is also a best practice is to consider pairing up new directors with more experience directors to act as their mentors during their first year on the Board. What is important in a mentoring process is that the mentor connects with the mentee following each Board meeting. The ED/CEO may also want to connect with new directors after their first few meetings as well.

It is important to bring the new Directors together after 6 months on the board as part of the orientation process. This is an opportunity for them to ask questions or seek additional information about the Foundation and the Board that they perhaps may not have felt comfortable asking at a Board meeting. They should set the agenda for this meeting. Experience has shown that having a meeting with this group creates a bond amongst the group. You should also ask them how the orientation process can be improved – and then act on their suggestions. The Executive Director/CEO and the Board Chair should host this meeting and it's best done over lunch or after work over appetizers as food is a great motivator for attendance!

What's Next?

Well, what's next is that you start back at the beginning and that within 6 months of your AGM you start this process all over again.

SOURCES and HELPFUL ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

[Community Sector Source - Newfoundland and Labrador](#)

[Imagine Canada Sector Source](#)

[Successful Board Self Assessments](#)



APPENDIX A

Board Member's Commitment	Organization's Commitment
Demonstrate commitment to the mission, vision, and values of the organization	Offer training and full information on all issues concerning the organization's mission, vision and principles
Devote the necessary time to attend board meetings, get involved in committee work and attend events	The chair strives to conduct board meetings within the time frame allotted. Committees receive staff support. Board members are alerted to the organization's events as far ahead of the event as possible.
Devote the necessary time to board orientation and preparation for board meetings (thoughtful reading of board package and response to communications from the organization)	The organization will provide a board orientation package and training. Board packages are sent out in a timely manner ahead of meetings
Be open to represent the organization at events	The organization regularly offers its board members opportunities to represent the organization at events and other relevant community meetings
To exercise: leadership, teamwork/consensus building, sound judgment on difficult and complex matters that come to the board	The provision of well organized, timely, appropriate information will aid sound decision making
Personal integrity and objectivity. Declaration of any conflict of interest that would prevent me from discharging my responsibilities as a board member	Open and transparent governance processes and decision making
Willingness to contribute financially to the best of my ability	Timely and appropriate donor recognition. Orientation on planned giving options.
Willingness to 'open-the-door' to (insert #) of individuals, organizations, or businesses who may have an opportunity to advance the work of the organization	Staff support in promoting the organization and assistance in securing support from these sources



APPENDIX B

Board Orientation Checklist

Name:		Signature:	
Date Appointed to the Board:			
Date Orientation Started:		Date Orientation Completed:	
Provide General Information			
	Provided by:	Date/Initial	
History of the organization	CEO		
Overview of Operational Areas	CEO		
Organizational / Board / Staff / Committee Structure & Function	CEO		
Board Orientation which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Articles of Incorporation ▪ Bylaws ▪ Board Policies and Committee Terms of Reference ▪ Board and Employee Contact Information 	Board Effect Via Executive Assistant		
Vision, Mission, Principals and Values of the organization both locally and nationally	CEO		
Strategic and Business Plans	CEO		
Most Recent Annual Report	CEO		
Most Recent Audited Financial Statements	Treasurer & CEO		
Board Calendar	Executive Assistant		
Board Remuneration of Expenses	Executive Assistant		
Roles and Responsibilities			
Review Board, associated committees and their roles	Board Chair		
Discuss expectations and responsibilities for and of new Board members	Board Chair		
Committee Structure and Function	Board Chair		
Communications – Social Media etc.	CEO		
Donor Stewardship - Thank You Calls to Donors	CEO		
Policies and Procedures			



Review Board policies and procedures with new Board members	Board Chair	
Financial Management		
Discuss Budget process	Treasurer &/or CEO	
Provide current year's budget and budget management	Treasurer &/or CEO	
Other Information		
Access to Board / Committee Information via Board Portal (Board Effect)	Executive Assistant	
Tour of facilities and offices	CEO	
Provide brochures and other promotional materials	CEO	
Confidential Agreement and Declaration of Conflict Forms	Executive Assistant	
Outlook Board Effect – other technology	Executive Assistant	
New Member Comments:		
CEO Signature:		



APPENDIX C



Board of Directors Application Form

Thank you for your interest in joining the Community Foundation of Northwestern Alberta’s Board! Please use this form to provide useful information about yourself, to ensure the best match between you and our organization to consider you for a Board of Directors position.

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____ Cell number: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Employer: _____

Briefly describe why you would like to join the Community Foundation of Northwestern Alberta Board of Directors:

Please list your volunteer and board experience:



Personal references name and phone number

1. _____

2. _____

When you join the Board, you agree that you can provide at least 8-10 hours a month in attendance to Board and Committee meetings, preparation of meetings and attending events, and that you do not have any conflict-of-interest in participating on the Board. All information provided will be kept confidential.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

By signing below, I agree to the above terms and permit Foundation to check my references as part of the selection process.

Attachments:

Please note the following documents must be attachments:

- Please attach a criminal check that is less than 30 days old.
- Please attach a letter of request to be considered for a board position.
- Please attach a current resume.