

# The Board Development Cycle: Beyond the Nominating Committee

By Dottie Schindlinger & Sonia J. Stamm

Dottie is the Governance Technology Evangelist and a founding team member of BoardEffect.

Sonia is BoardEffect's governance consultant and principal of Stamm Consultancy, Inc.



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Welcome to a new era in board development for aging services organizations, when all eyes are on the board not only for what it does but also for what it looks like and how it works.

Gone is the old notion of a Nominating Committee that functions perhaps once a year, when its members look around the board table and ask, "Do you know anybody good we could invite to the board?"

Today's most effective boards are transitioning that committee into a full-fledged Governance or Board Development Committee, whose mandate is to ensure proper care and feeding of the board, in part by implementing an ongoing board development cycle.

It's the power seat on the board – the strategic committee that ensures the capacity of the board to govern effectively.

The Governance Committee engages the board – driving board development in alignment with the strategic plan and the organization's needs.

## The Annual Board Development Plan

Good board development is not episodic – it's a continuous cycle. You can't have a good recruitment process without a clear understanding of your needs, your strategy and where you're heading – all of which

necessitates a solid board education and evaluation process.

Recruitment follows, which leads to on-boarding, which when done right leads to board engagement, which ensures strong retention.

Everything is connected.

## The First Step: Creating Your Board's Profile

The most basic board profile includes the current board roster in the first column and a list of specific attributes – such as term of office, term expiration date, age range, gender, race/ethnicity, affiliations and expertise – along the top row.

Filling in this matrix provides a good starting point to get a sense of the diversity of your board and identify gaps. Research shows that the more diverse a board, the better the decisions the group will make.

To complete the board profile, include a list of all the areas of expertise you feel are required to govern your organization effectively.

Go back to your strategic plan for guidance. To pull off those strategic priorities, what skill sets, experience and connections do board members need?

## Sample Board Profile

Board Members	Term Dates	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Age Range	Expertise	Affiliation	Skill Set	Approach to Decision Making
B. Conner	1/12-12/15	Female	Caucasian	45-55	Attorney	ABA	Legal, by-laws, policies, contracts	Assesses risk, weighs all options
J. Dome	1/13-12/16	Male	Latino	65-75	Local business owner	Chamber of Commerce	Sales, business planning	Negotiates, influences others
F. Gilly	1/13-12/16	Male	African American	55-65	CPA	AICPA	Finance, accounting, taxes	Bottom-line focused
R. Shilling	1/14-12/17	Male	Caucasian	65-75	Retired school principal	Resident	Community relations	Community focused
A. Jones	1/13-12/16	Male	Caucasian	65-75	Retired engineer	Resident	Process, organization	Seeks consensus
New candidate #1	1/16-12/19	Ideally female	Need diversity	Ideally <55	Local business person	Any new affiliation	Philanthropy, networking, advocacy	Weights options, but doesn't shy from making choices; well-connected thought leader
New candidate #2	1/16-12/19	Ideally female	Need diversity	Ideally <75	Attorney	ABA	Specialty in aging issues, ACA, OAG	Assesses risk, weighs all options

This will help guide you in developing a list of potential sources of candidates that fit the profile.

Create your list and then try to match these areas of expertise against your current board list – the more specific your answers, the better the board profile will be.

Highlight any gaps in the current roster. For example, in the Sample Board Profile here, the attorney member's term is about to expire, and greater gender, ethnic and age diversity may be needed going forward.

### Developing the Talent Pipeline

Developing the pipeline of talented, smart, committed volunteers needed to fill your dream board profile

can seem like a daunting task...which is why it's an activity that should be ongoing, can't begin soon enough and can involve the full board as well as senior management.

Having said that, it also shouldn't become an undue burden on the group.

### Leveraging Board Committees

Board committees are the perfect setting to develop future board leaders. They allow prospective candidates a chance to demonstrate – in real-time – how they work in teams, how they make decisions, which areas of expertise they bring to the table, how they leverage their networks to accomplish goals and their availability.

Likewise, serving on a committee allows individuals to assess your organization: what level of support they receive for their work, organizational culture, personalities of fellow members, how volunteer effort is recognized and possible ways they can leverage their skills and time to add value. On both sides, a year-long committee engagement can be an exceptional way to recruit and evaluate potential board members.

Of course, this assumes that serving on your board's committees will be a positive experience for prospective candidates. It could be that some committees have ceased being effective and warrant review. Viewing committees through the lens of recruitment can sometimes provide the perfect motivation to do some overdue housekeeping.

## Make Recruiting Everyone's Job

While the board is ultimately responsible to ensure its own sustainability, everyone with a stake in the organization's success should be tapped to help recruit the best board possible.

Once recruiting needs have been determined, don't shy away from casting the net wide. Provided you have a clear, consistent process for nominations and elections (see below), you can only gain from inviting all stakeholders to submit suggestions for board membership.

This can happen through your website, through your newsletter, through flyers (one-page overviews of the organization with the board member job description) provided to all board and staff members to distribute, as well as through board member "job postings" in local/national/trade press and on LinkedIn.

Consider including a 10-minute recruitment update on every board meeting agenda. During this time, board members should be asked to report on specific recruitment efforts they have made. Great ideas can be logged in a running file of recruitment strategies that become part of your Board Member Handbook.

Hold members accountable — if they fail to report any activities at two meetings in a row, the board chair should pull them aside to find out why. Recruitment is everyone's job but, ultimately, the board's responsibility.

## Nominations and Elections

Critical to board development is ensuring that you have a clear, consistent and transparent policy for how new members can be nominated to join the board and get elected to office. Ideally, the process includes:

1. Board member job descriptions with criteria for qualified applicants, expectations for board members, length of term, etc.
2. Clear steps outlined for how candidates can be nominated (or nominate themselves), including where to send their applications, deadlines, election cycles and what to expect.
3. A stated review process, spearheaded ideally by the Governance Committee, which uses a consistent evaluation and vetting process for potential candidates.
4. A transparent and well-understood election process that is codified in the bylaws. You want to make it as clear and straightforward as possible for someone to throw his or her hat in the ring.

## On-Boarding: More Than an Orientation Meeting

Orienting new members should include much more than a "dog and pony show." Ideally, the Governance Committee develops a planned set of activities to engage new board members in the organization's mission — visiting with residents, attending programs, participating in activities — as well as a series of meetings with key board and staff.

Pair your new recruits with a “board buddy” – someone who has served on the board long enough to help the new member learn the ropes.

Additionally, provide members with a comprehensive Board Member Handbook that includes a synopsis of board and organizational culture along with up-to-date versions of the bylaws, mission, vision, strategic plan and board policies:

- Conflict of Interest
- Code of Ethics
- Whistleblower Protection
- Document Retention

Using board management software (a board portal) can help immensely with the orientation process – for example, by ensuring all members have ready access to the most current versions of the handbook and assisting with meeting scheduling.

Even better, incoming board members can explore the portal on their own and get a sense of the culture of the board, including how the group deliberates and arrives at decisions.

## Retention Strategies

Now that you have committed, vetted, eager board members, don't lose them! But don't make the mistake of keeping them indefinitely either.

Among the keys to successful board retention is effective board engagement which, while it is among the top challenges reported by nonprofit leaders, is a top indicator of board effectiveness.

Ensuring that board members understand their roles, receive timely and relevant information and find value in contributing their time, knowledge and expertise is essential.

To that end, consider the following tools for promoting effective retention:

### 1. Recruitment

As stated above, start by identifying the right people for the right roles at a given time (looking ahead, not backward).

### 2. Meeting agendas

Ensure that board and committee meetings are framed for overall governance, not just oversight or fiduciary management. The most engaging work for most boards includes planning, collaboration and generative thinking about the organization.

### 3. Terms and rotation policies

Ensure that board members serve reasonable terms (typically two or three consecutive two-year or three-year terms) and enforce your rotation policies. Board members who perform well have earned a break, just as the board deserves an opportunity to align board seats with changing organizational needs.

### 4. Board evaluation

By conducting a board self-assessment on a regular basis, boards can ensure they are performing at an optimal level and leverage the opportunity to improve.

### 5. Board education

Augment board members' knowledge about the organization, its market, trends in the field and effective governance on a continuous basis to enhance board discussions and impact.

Like every board function, board development requires an ongoing, conscious commitment by the whole to be effective. Similarly, it also is an essential component of effective governance.

As public scrutiny of boards now includes reviewing the group's diversity, engagement and overall performance, boards must devote sufficient time and attention to enhancing the effectiveness of the entire governance function.

In today's world where the aging services landscape is ever-shifting, an exceptional governance function is a vital determining factor in mission achievement.

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## CONTACT US TODAY

866.672.2666

info@boardeffect.com

## UNITED STATES

1385 Broadway  
19th Floor  
New York, NY  
10018

## LONDON

1-3 Strand  
London  
WC2N 5EH,  
UK

## NEW ZEALAND

17 Birmingham Dr.  
Middleton  
Christchurch, 8024  
NZ