

[Back to Blog](#)

# Top Twelve Tips for Courting New Board Members

Tuesday, April 22nd, 2014

With nearly 2 million board seats opening up in the United States every year, it's not easy for nonprofit leaders to successfully compete for, and win over, fantastic new board members. Our job at BoardAssist is to do just that – identify and “lock in” those high impact agents of change for our nonprofit clients. If you are navigating this process on your own, here are some useful tips.

## Top Twelve Tips for Courting New Board Members

### Advice from BoardAssist on How to Successfully Recruit the Perfect Board Member

- 1. The competition is fierce.** Many of the best candidates often have several boards competing for them. You'll come out on top by being as responsive, professional, enthusiastic and courteous as possible during every stage of the courting process.
- 2. Stay in touch.** Never let more than a week go by during the interviewing period without contacting your candidate. If you're waiting on sign off from a board member and can't get in touch, invite the candidate to see one of your programs in action, or send them news coverage – but keep the dialogue open. Respond to all phone calls and emails within 24 hours.
- 3. Treat the candidate as if he or she was one of your most important funders.** Handle the courting process well, and the candidate might become a major funder or create an annuity for your nonprofit. If a foundation asked you to submit a grant proposal for a large annual gift, most nonprofits would make that a top priority. Give your candidate the same consideration.
- 4. Unplug the ATM machine.** Most people join nonprofit boards because they want to share their intellectual capital, not just their checkbook. Make it clear that there are plenty of ways to engage aside from fundraising: share examples of interesting projects members have worked on recently, stress how valuable their contributions were and how appreciative the board was, and the impact their work had.
- 5. Show your team spirit.** Make it clear that your board works well together as a team – discuss the positive relationship between the Executive Director and Board Chair. With so many options out there, finding a highly functional group of people who enjoy spending time together is important. Give some color about the board...and be likable!

**6. Make the candidate your new BFF.** Even if your offer is declined, there's no reason not to engage the candidate with your organization in some other role. Anyone who has expressed interest in joining your board is someone who you should easily be able to convert to a volunteer or donor if a board seat is not appropriate. Don't let them walk away!

**7. Make the candidate feel special and needed.** Highlight what your potential board member will add to the team and how much you value the unique skills and experiences they have to offer. Where do you need them most? Toss out some project ideas to stir up excitement about being engaged when they've signed on.

**8. Trustees don't need a trust fund or Roman numeral at the end of their name to sit on this board.** Be clear about the expected annual financial commitment. Board candidates often worry that they will be called upon to donate more than they anticipated, either personally or via connections. Help allay that fear by spelling out exactly what's required, and be sure to explain all the ways their commitment can be met, through selling tickets to the annual benefit, company-matched donations, etc.

**9. Tic Toc.** Most candidates want to be agents of change for the boards they join. Along with their desire to be active members comes the desire for consideration and flexibility when work/life gets in the way of their good intentions. Be clear about expectations and commitments: e.g., frequency of board meetings, locations and times, and committee responsibilities. Stress that board service is very project-based, and for that reason, a manageable time commitment for most members.

**10. Be honest.** Dispel any myths they may have about your organization. If you are a large, established nonprofit, trustees may be concerned there won't be a way to truly engage. If you are a startup, candidates may be worried that the board won't function professionally. Don't be afraid to disabuse them of fiction.

**11. Show off!** Without fail, one of the most important things nonprofit leaders forget to do is boast a bit; they are often too busy focusing on the tasks at hand to hit pause and paint a full picture of all they are getting done. Pull out your last grant proposal. The same projects you bragged about to your funders will be of interest to your board candidates. Earned a recent grant from the Gates Foundation, partnered with MIT on a computer lab for inner city children, or received some special recognition for your work? Share your amazing stories and best metrics, and be sure to include any third party validation.

**12. Ask for help.** Consider working with a nonprofit board matching service like [BoardAssist](#), who will be your voice and advocate on your behalf. Matching services, that are nonprofits themselves, exist to help busy nonprofit leaders like you. They actively source the critical intellectual and financial capital you need to do your good work, and share your success stories with the people who will care most about your accomplishments.

Tags: [governance](#), [volunteer recruiting](#)

BoardAssist, a New York based nonprofit corporation, is the leading personalized board recruiting resource available to the tri-state nonprofit community. We offer New Yorkers who want to make a real change in the nonprofit world a wide selection of board options and advice on selecting the right one for them.

Our nonprofit clients range from start-up organizations to some of the most established names

in the nonprofit community, and serve interest areas from arts and education to the environment and poverty relief. Though most BoardAssist clients are New York-based, they serve locally, nationally and internationally. BoardAssist has been responsible for bringing over \$65 million into the nonprofit community through our board placements over the last 15 years.