

# • GETTING TO A TRULY FUNCTIONAL BOARD FOR NOT-FOR-PROFITS

By Carla Gail Tibbo

Those faces around the board table – do you really know who they are, how they got there, and what they really bring to the organization? If you're the Executive Director or the Board Chair, you likely have a hand in selecting those people. Whether it's a governance board or an operational board, its composition and dynamics are the difference between a really functional and contributing group of people and a set of faces that you're not sure about...

What a not-for-profit needs is visionaries, leaders, champions for their organization. Strong board members are like a sales force that get the message out to their networks, generate donors, advocate, and support in many ways.... A well-rounded group with a broad skill set only comes with analyzing and selecting the right people and facilitating their active and purposeful participation.

And how long have those board members been around? If you have a board that has set terms of service for board members but some are re-elected

many times, you aren't getting the extra energy and infusion of different ideas and perspectives that new board members bring. Some continuity is great, but long tenures of members doesn't usually work well.

Some boards are made up of people with a common affinity – like a passion for a particular sport, or a life affected by a particular health issue. While it is beneficial and irreplaceable to have the perspectives of people close to an issue, organizations at some level have to be run like businesses, so some cold, hard, emotionless business savvy is essential.

Organizations truly benefit by understanding the skills, attributes and competencies members bring to the Board. This allows the staff to tap into Board members when they require assistance in a particular area, and to fill Board vacancies with new members who complement and enhance the competencies of the Board overall. A key attribute of any Board is to know what members can/will do for the organization, not what they are or where they have been.

So to make this work...



Ask these three key questions:

1. What are the 3 most important things for the Board to accomplish this year?
2. Who is willing/prepared/capable of doing what?
3. We have the right people on board to accomplish what we want to do?



Determine what actions you need Board members to take:

Here are examples of areas where board strength is needed.

1. Develop an actionable strategic plan with KPIs
2. Generate positive relationships with.....
3. Identify potential large donors and meet with them
4. Review accounting procedures and identify areas for improvement
5. Assess contracts and recommend modifications



## BOARD MAPPING PROCESS

It is important to look at Board members not for their characteristics, but for what they can and will do for the board. Often people look for skills (like accounting), demographics (age, ethnicity) and personal connections (like ties to people and/or organizations that can be approached for donations). These areas are not as important as what the individual will actually bring to the table. In other

words, it's not who they are or who they work for, but what are they going to DO and how are they going to make a difference.

This is a good tool to use. It takes time and thoughtful conversations to get all this information from existing members. The tool works well as a discussion guide to use with prospective new ones.



## BOARD MAPPING TOOL

	Existing Board Members		New Board Member	
	Jerry	Ann		
<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>				
Age (or age range)				
Gender				
Ethnicity & language				
Education				
Professional affiliations				
Volunteer experience				
Notable accomplishments				
<b>EXPERTISE</b>				
Organizational development				
Human resource management				
Governance				
Negotiation skills				
Financial management and budgeting				
Contract creation and assessment				
<b>PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES</b>				
Visionary				
Networker				
Visibility/involvement in the community				
<b>AREAS OF EXPRESSED COMMITMENT</b>				
Willing to...				
Connects us to...				

After you've done all this work? You'll likely find that it is easier to accomplish the organization's goals, board members are more engaged, and fresh perspectives flow.

Easy? No. Quick? No again... but sooooo worthwhile in the long term. And this article may give you some good insights: <https://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/leadership/board-governance-depends-on-where-you-sit>