

Choosing a Nonprofit Board to Join



Joining the board of directors of a nonprofit organization can be a great way to be an active part of your community and share your skills and commitment for causes you care about. You can also develop leadership abilities and build your network. If you're ready to explore opportunities to serve on a nonprofit board, knowing where to start can be a little overwhelming. This guide offers some suggestions of questions to ask to find the best fit for you and the nonprofit.

The Roles & Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards

As a first step, learn more about the purpose and roles of the board of directors for a nonprofit. When you join a board, you will be agreeing to an important volunteer position that also has some legal requirements and obligations. For a good overview, read [Board Roles and Responsibilities](#) or register for a [Propel Nonprofits training or webinar](#) on the topic.

Your Nonprofit Board Service Journey

There are a few key questions to consider as you look for the right board to join:

- What **causes** or types of nonprofit work do I care about?
- What **skills do I want to offer** as a volunteer board member? What **skills do I want to develop**?
- Am I more interested in being part of a board that is very **hands-on** in running the organization? Or would a board that operates with a more **strategic governance role** be a better fit for me?
- How much **time** could I devote to board service, including board meetings, committees, and other volunteer activities? Do I have limitations on the schedule or frequency of meetings?
- How important is the **location** of the organization, and of the meetings?

- Am I willing and able to make a **financial contribution** to a nonprofit?
- And, importantly, **what will excite me about serving** on a nonprofit board?

Finding a Board to Join

There are several paths for exploring opportunities to join a board:

- **Use your network of colleagues and friends;** talk with people you know who are involved with nonprofits about their experiences and organizations where they've been involved. Many boards search for board members by asking their volunteers and current board members to recommend candidates. Update your LinkedIn profile to mention your interest in board service.
- **Review your previous volunteering or donations to nonprofits.** Many board members have been volunteers or supporters of an organization before joining the board. If you are particularly passionate and interested in certain nonprofits in your community, add them to your list to research further.
- If you're in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metro area, **review Propel Nonprofits' Board Connector opportunities.** You can submit your information through the online application; continue to monitor listings for opportunities for open board positions that intrigue you and let us know which one aligns with your interests: <https://www.propelnonprofits.org/join-a-board/>

Our mission is to fuel the impact and effectiveness of nonprofits with guidance, expertise, and capital. Learn more about our services, training, and resources online.

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Some Guidance and Tips for Your Search

There are many nonprofit organizations in the community, ranging from large to medium to small, working in health care, arts, social services, childcare, housing, animal rescue, and social justice. Some nonprofits have many employees and large boards, while many others operate with all volunteers. Each of these nonprofits has a board of directors and they have all developed a process to recruit, elect, and work with their boards. There is no single path to board service.

The board of directors is a legal role and is elected by either the current board or by the members, if it's a membership organization. There are generally several steps for the process of joining a board and it may take some time.

If you are interested in a specific nonprofit, especially if it's a well-known and prominent organization, consider volunteering as a way to get to know the organization and the staff before seeking a board role. These organizations often have many candidates for board service and will consider your past support and relationship with the organization.

Research the Organization

Once you've identified some nonprofits that interest you, do some research to learn more about it; reviewing its website, annual reports, or other publications, along with stories or videos about the impact of its programs. Are its core values in alignment with yours? Does the organization serve a community that you deeply care about?

Board members work closely with the organization's leadership and oversee finances and accountability to the community. Review the information about the current board members, leadership staff, and primary program areas. If its available, review the organization's financial information and any description of its sources of revenue.

Questions for the Organization

Once you are in conversation with a nonprofit to explore a board position, you'll probably want to learn more details about the programs, plans, and

activities that support the mission. As you talk with the executive director, board chair/president, or a governance committee member, here are some other questions to ask:

- What are the **highest priority goals and strategies** for the organization for the next few years?
- **What role does the board play** in strategic discussions and vision?
- What are the **challenges** that the organization is managing right now?
- What kind of **skills or perspectives** are needed on the board for the next few years, **how will I add value**?
- What is the expectation for board members to make a **personal financial contribution**? Are board members expected to be **involved in fundraising**, and how?
- What is the expectation for board members to **volunteer or offer pro bono services** in addition to participation on the board?

And some nuts and bolts questions:

- **When and where** are the board meetings? Does the board have committees, and are all board members expected to join a committee?
- What is the **average time commitment** for board members?
- What is your **board recruitment and orientation process**?
- Do you have **Directors' and Officers' insurance**?

You could also ask to talk with a board member about their experience, or to attend a board meeting as an observer.

Other Places to Research Board Openings

A few other places to search online for opportunities to join a nonprofit board:

- HandsOn Twin Cities
- Minnesota Council of Nonprofits Job Board
- Pollen