

Conducting an Inventory of Your Board

How Does Your Board Stack Up?

The best way to figure out the strength of your board's composition is to conduct a systematic board inventory. Typically, the governance committee completes this inventory.

Step 1. Skills

The committee should take an inventory of the skills you currently have on the board and the current gaps in skills that are needed. Next, you should chart out term limits and itemize when current trustees will be rotating off the board. Do you have other trustees with their skills to fill the gap, or should you be recruiting others with these same skills? It is a good idea for the governance committee to have an idea of board recruitment needs for the next two to three years.

Step 2. Qualities

The committee should look at the qualities that you may want or need on the board. Are there enough trustees with a good sense of humor on the board? Will the "devil's advocate" be rotating off at the end of this year? Are there enough entrepreneurial trustees on the board that thrive in startup situations? What are the additional value-added characteristics that new trustees could bring to enhance the functioning of the group? Clarify if there are qualities that you think all trustees should have.

Step 3. Diversity

The committee should examine current and desired levels of diversity on the board. Will both the board's Hispanic members be rotating off at the same time? Do you need more women on the board? Has there been a recent shift to a large percentage of trustees that live in the suburbs rather than in the city that ideally the committee would like to correct?

Step 4. Create a Prioritized List of Board Expansion Needs

Once the inventory is complete, the governance committee should create a prioritized list of ideal board candidates. Be as specific as you can. The more explicit you can be, the more likely you will be to get a candidate who is truly a good fit for your board. Saying, “We want a Hispanic woman, who is an accountant and lives in the city” will be much more helpful than just saying “We need an accountant.” The latter may cause you to reach out to your local chapter of Hispanic MBAs, while the former may have you casting too wide a net that won’t yield the right candidate for your board.

Step 5. Share Your Findings with the Full Board

Share the board inventory and a prioritized “Ideal Board-Candidate List” with the full board and the organization’s CEO. The full board and the CEO should weigh in and then vote to approve the prioritized types of candidates the governance committee will be looking for.