



## Frequently Asked Questions Prospective Board Candidates



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### 1. Why should I serve on a nonprofit board?

- You are at a point in your career where you would like to “give back.” You have specific professional skills and talents that you want to share with nonprofit organizations that can benefit from your experience.
- You have contributed your time and talent to community activities. You would like to apply this experience in helping to manage a nonprofit by serving on its board.
- You don’t have a lot of professional or volunteer experience, but you are passionate about some of the services that nonprofits provide and would like to contribute your time and energy to helping those agencies grow.
- The impact that you can have with three to five hours of board service a month is much higher than if you gave that same amount of time in direct service.
- Serving on a board can bolster and broaden your professional skills and give you valuable business experience.
- It is also a great way to meet people and expand your professional and social network.

### 2. Why would a nonprofit board want me? What do I have to offer?

- There is an enormous need for engaged board members in the nonprofit community. According to a recent study of nonprofits in Marin, fully 50% of board seats are currently not filled.
- Nonprofit boards need a variety of skills and talents on their boards – business experience from the for-profit world, fundraising ability, community connections, enthusiasm for creative and innovative thinking, etc. For many nonprofits, the skills and engagement of their board members is the key to maintaining a financially sustainable organization.

### 3. Does it matter that I’ve never served on a nonprofit board before?

- No. Most nonprofit boards want individuals who will grow with them. A good board is diverse. And most nonprofits are eager to hear from people at all points in their lives. On a practical note, it’s critical for any smart nonprofit to groom its next generation of leadership by bringing new voices to the table. In this respect, your relative “inexperience” can be an advantage.
- Many nonprofits value the freshness and energy of someone who has never served on a board before. Some of the most engaged, enthusiastic board members are serving for their first time.



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#### **4. Do I have to do fundraising and/or make an individual contribution if I join a board?**

- Virtually all nonprofits expect members of their board to do fundraising. Nonprofit boards are responsible for the financial health of the organization. As such, it is the board's role to attract funding resources to ensure the financial viability of the organization and its programs.
- Fundraising can take many forms, from inviting friends and colleagues to agency events; to securing "in kind" contributions from vendors and businesses; to writing personal thank you notes to donors; to helping to plan and execute a fundraising event.
- Some nonprofits require their board members to make personal, financial contributions – and some specify minimum contribution amounts. Others have no requirement for personal financial contributions.
- Part of the BoardMatch process is to ensure you understand what range of financial donation (if any) the agency is looking for and that you are comfortable with this expectation. BoardMatch will provide you with information agencies have given us relative to their fundraising expectations of board members, but ultimately it is your responsibility to verify this with the nonprofit when you interview with them.

#### **5. What's the minimum time commitment for board service and how much flexibility will I have?**

- Time commitments vary widely depending on the nonprofit and its stage of development. Some boards meet quarterly, have no committees and require very little of board members' time outside of board meetings. Other boards meet monthly, and even more frequently if they are engaged in a major project or facing financial challenges. Many boards require committee service and hands on involvement in agency programs or staff work. BoardMatch will find a board whose time commitment requirements are in line with what you are able to offer.
- Board members for many organizations can be very effective attending just a few board meetings a year. Reading the materials circulated in advance, formulating questions and outlining suggestions for a course of action – prior to the meeting – will allow you to have a considerable impact.
- Aside from attending board meetings, the bulk of nonprofit board service is project based and can be planned around your schedule.



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### 6. How does the board matching process work? How long does it take?

- It takes an average of two to three months to be matched. (See the “BoardMatch Process & Timeline” (link) page on this website).
- First, we help you identify the type of board which would suit you most – this includes looking at your interests, your schedule, availability, goals and your comfort level with a personal financial contribution.
- Based on your preferences, BoardMatch will review the opportunities available and select two or three that seem to be the best fit for you.
- The next step will be interviewing at these nonprofits with their Executive Director, Board Chair, Nominating Chair and/or Board Member.
- You will also likely be asked to sit in on a board meeting to see how the group operates. If you are not asked to do this, you should definitely ask for the chance to do so. Watching a board meeting in action is one of the best ways to determine if it is the right fit for you.
- If, after these steps, it looks like you would be a good match from the nonprofit’s perspective, they will invite you to join the board. It is then up to you to determine if it’s a good fit from your standpoint.
- While we make every effort to give you current and accurate information regarding the nonprofit organization you are considering, we strongly recommend that you verify the information with the agency as you go through the matching process. By moving forward with the BoardMatch process, you acknowledge that you will conduct your own independent research with respect to any particular board opportunity and rely on your own research in making your decision to join.

### 7. What happens if I go through the whole BoardMatch process and the fit doesn’t work out?

- Given the steps we go through, a bad fit is rare, but it is certainly possible. If the board you select isn’t what you expected, you can discuss a transition plan with the board president. Once we determine why it wasn’t a good fit, we can help you find another, more suitable board.

### 8. Can I serve on more than one board?

- Yes. You may start by looking to join just one board and end up joining more than one. When you begin talking with the leaders in the nonprofit community, and hear in detail how much change you can personally effect by joining a nonprofit board, it is sometimes hard to stop at just one.
- We recommend, though, that you start with just one organization and spend up to 6 to 8 months serving only on their board before committing to serve on a second board.



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- Also, keep in mind that serving on more than one board means fundraising for more than one cause. You should consider whether you will be able to do this, as a practical matter. Also, you should ensure that the organizations on whose boards you are planning to serve do not compete with each other for clients or funding sources, as this may represent a conflict of interest.
- 9. What if I'm interested in a Marin nonprofit board that isn't listed on the BoardMatch website?**
- While BoardMatch's primary objective is to match potential candidates with openings listed on the website, if you are interested in applying for a board that is not listed on our website, and that nonprofit is a member of the Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership, we will contact the agency to find out if they have any openings and to see if they have a preliminary interest in your candidacy.
- 10. Will I be required to submit references?**
- You should be prepared to submit references. While BoardMatch does not check references, we strongly encourage the agencies to do so when they are ready to invite a candidate to join a board.