



Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership

Thinking of joining a Nonprofit Board?

Core questions to help inform your decision

Like any enterprise, nonprofit organizations are complex. Most struggle with the dual challenges of delivering on a mission while raising funds and remaining financially sustainable. It is the rare board member who serves his or her full board term without encountering some organizational difficulties along the way.

To be most effective as a board member, you want to understand the organization's context, focus and ways of operating and know what you will be joining before you agree to serve. Consider asking the following questions of the organization's Executive Director and current board members during your interview process:

- Does the organization have a strategic plan? A business plan? If so, how are these plans developed? How are plans monitored against actual agency performance?
- What are the organization's goals for the next 2 to 3 years? What is the primary role of the board in helping the organization achieve these goals?
- What are the main sources of income and what percentage of the total comes from each?
- Does the agency have an unrestricted operating reserve? If so, how many months of operating expenses can it cover?
- How has the organization changed and grown in the past 2 to 3 years? How stable are the core programs and staff?
- What is the average tenure of current board members? Check the nonprofit's website or ask for a board roster with a brief bio for each board member.
- Does the organization provide Directors and Officers Insurance coverage for board members?
- Are there any pending legal actions against the agency? Has the agency been involved in litigation in the past 5 years?
- Are there any recent or anticipated changes in the political or social realms that will impact the organization in terms of relevance of mission, funding streams, overall strategy and/or business plans?
- What organizational issues, strategic questions, opportunities are anticipated that will require board attention and engagement in the next 1 to 3 years?

Pay attention not only to the answers provided, but also to the readiness with which the Executive Director and board members engage on these topics and provide you with the information you seek. By engaging organizational leaders in a discussion of these important governance-focused topics, you'll be better informed as to your decision to join the board and it sets the stage for effective communication and a meaningful and productive board service experience.