

Identifying Up-and-Coming Board and Committee Talent

BY RICHARD TOLLEFSON



How Can Nonprofits Attract the Best-of-the-Best?

CEOs sitting on nonprofit boards who are tasked with recruiting new members might, at first, wonder, “Where will I find these leaders — especially since the best are already on other boards?”

There are plenty of places to find exceptional, untapped talent for boards, says Leezie Kim, chair for Arizona Community Foundation’s board of directors, and Anne Marbarger, CEO of Curebound, a San Diego-based cancer research organization.

“It’s our mission to always be recruiting for great board talent,” says Kim. “Our current board members are our best source of new board-member candidates.” Those board members, she says, strategically align themselves so that they have a steady recruitment pool; they look within the industry organizations and clubs to which they belong, and they attend events with the like-minded people they want to attract.

Kim, an immigrant and first-generation American, is on the board of a national Korean American advocacy organization as well as the Arizona Asian American Bar Association. That affiliation introduced her to sister organizations, including Arizona’s Black bar association and Los Abogados, the Hispanic bar association. “I am around tons of talent, as a result — lawyers from different backgrounds who are philanthropic and active in their communities.”

For Curebound, two major fundraising events set the stage for recruitment. “These events have up to

5,000 in attendance, and many different corporations have teams and sponsorships,” says Marbarger of Padres Pedal the Cause, a ride, walk, run and spinning fundraiser, and Concert for Cures, which attracts top-name artists. “We’re introduced to people who are passionate about finding cures for cancer.” They share their personal stories and experience firsthand about how Curebound’s mission aligns with their passion.

Utilize Data, Documentation

“We’re able to build strong relationships by getting to know the stories of event participants and volunteers,” says Marbarger. For Padres Pedal, profile pages on Curebound’s website track fundraising progress and share the cancer stories of volunteers. The online updates make clear who the top fundraisers are. “Often, we just reach out for coffee and get to know these individuals better.” Many times, their stories and Curebound’s relationship-building lead to new board leadership.

As nonprofits seek to identify and engage new board members, it’s important, also, to spell out board-member responsibilities. What are the recruitment goals, participation requirements and expected financial



contributions? Share these expectations in writing and have volunteer leaders sign commitment forms. Let them know performance discussions will occur throughout their board tenure.

It's also important to maintain well-constructed recruitment and board composition grids so the nonprofit knows who to attract. Would the board benefit from specific professional and industry expertise, life experience or demographic profiles? Having a diverse mix of board-member skills is integral to an optimally functioning board.

Diversify In Every Way

Diversity, of course, extends beyond professional talent to include individuals of various ages, geographies, ethnicities, career stages, genders and gender identities, stages of wealth and political affiliations.

It's not a matter of checking off the DEI box. As a person of color who has worked in the corporate, national security and, currently, legal worlds, Kim says,

“Nonprofits don't ever want to think of things as, ‘Oh, we've got our person.’ Why? Because it's lonely if you're the only one. You want to build a sense of diversity because you want people to be respectful but frank, and bring those other important perspectives to the table.”

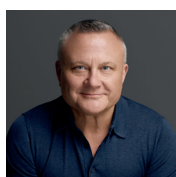
If diversity is treated as tokenism, says Kim, it's not going to be what a nonprofit wants, “which is diversity of experience and thought. You become better as an organization when you have rich discussions, including a variety of perspectives. It's just good for business.”

Take A 360° View

Part of attracting the best new talent involves a 360-degree view of engagement. That means the nonprofit considers not only the value and skills that good board members bring to the organization but also what's in it for the volunteer. Is the prospective board member motivated by community visibility, networking opportunities, a commitment to the cause? Find out.

Marbarger says her nonprofit, which works in collaboration with six other cancer-research institutions (another source of board recruitment), pays close attention to what their board members want. Curebound has begun providing impact reports that illustrate the influence of board members' volunteer work and donations — from a research, community and organizational-growth perspective.

“Board members are an organization's best friends and assets,” says Marbarger. “It's just foundational to success to keep them happy, with the intent and hope they will be forever friends of the organization.”



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