

Eight Steps to Building the Board of Your Dreams

If you think only the most prestigious art museums and universities can attract the kind of board members who are generous investors, willing askers, and visionary partners, Lynn Doughty of the BHC Consulting Group asks you to think again. Here are her eight steps to recruiting your own Dream Team:

1.) **Set Organizational Goals.** What are your priorities for this year? Where do you want your organization to be in five years? Are you preparing for a capital campaign? Do you need to strengthen your Annual Fund? Do you need specific expertise on staff? Do you want more media exposure? If you don't already have a strategic plan guiding your operations, start thinking about where your organization needs to focus in order to be more successful. Potential board members will want to know where they will fit into your organization and how their skill set will help you accomplish your goals. If you can articulate that connection, you will have a very powerful recruiting tool.

2.) **Recruit a Governance Committee.** A governance committee will be tasked with getting your organization focused on recruiting the right people for the right reasons. Meeting throughout the year, they will ensure that potential board members are considered carefully, recruited respectfully and oriented fully. They will also work with current board members to ensure their experience is meeting their expectations.

3.) **Do Some Myth Busting.** Organizations should understand a board's strengths and weaknesses by evaluating--at a minimum--geography, profession, expertise, capacity to give, and willingness to solicit gifts. Sometimes this process merely confirms beliefs. Sometimes, however, the results reveal hidden assets or previously unrecognized shortcomings. For instance, an organization focused on its board's perceived overabundance of lawyers may be missing something more critical, like a board "too young" to make or influence major gifts.

4.) **Identify Your Dream Team!** Determine the criteria by which you will rate potential board members. If your board evaluation reveals too few people with the capacity to make major gifts and one of your goals is to beef up major gift fundraising, then make that one criteria. If your organization can benefit from fresh thinking and energy that often is associated with younger board members, then place a premium on youth in your board recruitment efforts.

5.) **Make Assignments.** Once you have identified 8-10 potential board members who meet key criteria, assign their recruitment to people on the governance committee. If you do not have direct access to potential members on your committee, begin to have conversations with the people who do know them and ask to be introduced.

6.) **Emphasize the Needs You Meet.** Come to your first recruiting meeting with a summary of what your organization does and whom your organization benefits. Bring copies of any positive media coverage your organization has received. Bring lists of your

organization's staff and board members. Focus on the needs you **meet**, not the needs you have, and you will be an inspiring recruiter.

7.) **Bring Them Into Your Organizational "Hug."** Once you've had a great first meeting, don't stop! If you have their interest, offer to introduce them to other key people: the board president, the executive director, etc. At that second meeting, make it official. Encourage others on your board to make an effort to welcome them with an email or phone call.

8.) **Educate and Celebrate.** It doesn't have to be formal or complicated, but your orientation should inform new board members about your organization's history, your present and your future. And, please, by all means, invite them to a party given in their honor!

The timeframe for this process is usually six months to one year. That means that if your organization starts taking these steps today, you will be well on your way to creating the Board of Your Dreams by this time next year!