

Why Join a Nonprofit Board?

Countless factors affect the success of businesses and the communities they serve. Because there are so many factors, it is nearly impossible to provide a statistically sound measure of the inputs that lead to a profitable outcome, a satisfied group of customer base, or a healthy community. Consider the following statements, and ask yourself if you agree with the logic found in a survey of 50 corporations that encourage nonprofit board involvement among their employees:

- Businesses that demonstrate an interest in their customers' communities are likely to attract greater brand loyalty than those that don't.
- Professionals whose businesses support their interest in community service report higher levels of job satisfaction and a greater commitment to their companies. Professionals who become involved with nonprofit boards describe a strong sense of personal gratification, unique networking opportunities, and insights to leadership they are unlikely to have received on the job.
- Many nonprofit organizations are eager to learn from the skills business professionals have to offer. Likewise, many business professionals learn from their nonprofit experience.

As nonprofits demonstrate greater appreciation for standard business practices and businesses learn the value of demonstrating good corporate citizenship, stronger affiliations are developing between the nonprofit and business sectors. Recognizing the benefits of community involvement, progressive businesses are encouraging volunteerism at all levels, including the highest level of volunteering in the nonprofit sector: board membership. Business professionals who serve on nonprofit boards report unexpectedly high returns on their investments of time and energy. Not only do they get to make a difference in people's lives, they have fresh experiences of leadership as they negotiate decisions and build relationships with peers in the boardroom. The unique nonprofit governance experience helps them see society from a fresh perspective while it frequently earns them recognition — both within the community and at work.

Why join a nonprofit board? You're busy. Volunteer time takes away from work time and time with friends and family. Why do it?

Many people volunteer for nonprofit boards because they want to support a cause that is meaningful to them. Many want to give something back to the communities in which they live or to communities that have been generous to them in the past. Regardless of the reason one volunteers, committed board members stand to gain both personally and professionally from participation on nonprofit boards.

Recognition — As a board member, you will be seen as having made a significant commitment to an organization dedicated to social good. You will have opportunities to interact with other business professionals and people from varied backgrounds in planning, problem solving, and ensuring the nonprofit achieves its goals. Valuable human relationships are cultivated in these board experiences.

Experience — Nonprofit boards aim for diversity; therefore, your peers on the board are likely to come from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and social groups. As part of the board team, you will be required to plan and make decisions for the good of the organization. You will have opportunities to practice new ways of working in groups, influencing decisions, negotiating toward a common goal.

Satisfaction — You will, in fact, be giving one of your most valuable assets — time — to the direct benefit of an organization whose work you believe in. You will bring professional skills that may be useful to the nonprofit. If the organization follows generally expected evaluation standards, you will be able to see how it changes over time.

Your professional skills and business expertise may be a highly valued contribution to a nonprofit board. With imagination and a readiness to adapt, you should be able to help the nonprofit where you choose to volunteer advance its goals. Nonprofits, now more than ever, appreciate the similarities and differences between themselves and the business sector. You can help the nonprofit behave more like business — where that behavior is appropriate — and the nonprofit can help you experience the depth of a value-driven system.

The Business Professional's Guide to Nonprofit Board Service is written for business professionals who want a better understanding of the responsibilities of nonprofit boards and how they function. Its target is individuals, but it offers valuable information to businesses that see community involvement as a smart practice. You will find the legal obligations of nonprofit boards, their responsibilities, structures, and practices. You will find explanations of the contrasts between how business operates and how nonprofits operate. You will find guiding questions to ask both yourself and the nonprofits that interest you. These tools will help you understand the meaning of a commitment to nonprofit board service and will help you find an organization that is a good match for your interests and skills.

Participation in the governance of an organization dedicated to social good is an extraordinarily rewarding way to make a contribution to society. Learning ahead of time what to expect will make this experience highly rewarding.