



The Essential Role of the Trusteeship Committee

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Successful modern philanthropy increasingly requires active and engaged volunteer leaders. Ideally, philanthropic leadership begins with the board, be it the governing board or the foundation board, depending on the type of nonprofit and its structure. During a campaign it is common for leading institutions to receive 20%-30% or more of their campaign total from board giving.

Fundraising success means having a highly engaged board that provides robust philanthropic leadership. Such leadership requires trustees who participate actively in conducting the business of the board and its committees, make pace-setting leadership gifts, and influence those within their network to give. A Trusteeship Committee should ideally take the lead in this effort.

Trusteeship Committee

The Trusteeship Committee's responsibilities are among the most important work conducted by a board. When properly organized and empowered, the Trusteeship Committee should be responsible for recruiting exceptional members to the board who bring professional expertise, philanthropic leadership, and a passion for the organization's mission. They do this by using a proactive and long-term approach to recruitment, by clearly articulating expectations for board member responsibilities (including giving), and by holding board members accountable for their service.

Recruitment

The recruitment of outstanding members may be a board's single most important function. After

all, if bright and committed people are involved in any undertaking, its chances for success rise immeasurably. Assembling a talented and diverse board requires deliberate planning and action.

You should begin by identifying the ideal characteristics you seek in board members. These may include:

- Geographic regions.
- Industries represented.
- Demographics.
- Professional expertise.
- A passion for your mission.
- Capacity and willingness to be leadership donors.

In addition, the board has its own internal work that must be handled, often including investments, audits, risk management, advocacy, and fundraising. The board needs the necessary array of talent to complete this work at a high level. To get there, patience is important. The best future members are busy people likely engaged with other worthy organizations. Having conversations with prospective members months or even years in advance ensures a smooth and professional courtship as you get to know their level of interest and they come to better understand what is required to be an effective board member. It also makes a positive initial impression on prospective members that your organization is a professional entity that is deliberate and thoughtful about growing the board's membership.

Establishing Board Member Expectations

Board members want to do a good job. They desire to make an impact. In most cases, they have active professional and personal lives. Still they have already demonstrated a commitment to you by their willingness to serve. And they want to clearly understand their role so that they can make a meaningful contribution with the time they give you.

It is important that the Trusteeship Committee, properly supported and facilitated by the professional fundraising staff, sets forth in clear terms the expectations of every member of the board. At a minimum, this should include their service on one or

more committees and attendance at committee and board meetings, their advocacy of your organization, their identification and engagement of prospective donors, and their own leadership giving, however you choose to define that. These expectations should be discussed and adopted by vote by the full board and discussed actively with prospective board members during the recruitment process.

Accountability

Good organizations recruit outstanding board members and set forth clearly articulated board member responsibilities. The best organizations also routinely hold members accountable for their participation, engagement, and giving. Ownership of this task is the job of the Trusteeship Committee. Consider the following questions:

- Has the board member regularly attended meetings and actively participated in them?
- Has the board member contributed to the necessary work of the committee(s) and board?
- Has the board member made their own philanthropic leadership gift(s) and helped to identify and engage other prospective donors?

These matters should all be discussed at least annually with every board member. A simple self-assessment completed prior to an in-person meeting may be useful to help each member think about how they have fulfilled their duties during the prior year.

It is not uncommon for Trusteeship Committees to also have responsibility for strategic planning, leadership succession planning, and the nomination of officers and committee chairs. Coupled with their work in recruitment, setting expectations, and board member accountability, the Trusteeship Committee should be an entity that has substantial impact on the long-term trajectory and success of not just the board but the entire institution. After all, if optimally populated, inspired, and directed, the board will be a highly influential group of professional and civic leaders who advocate for your mission, make some of the largest gifts to your fundraising campaigns, and enable you to strengthen the impact on those you serve.

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