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Lane Gorman Trubitt, L.L.P.
Accountants & Advisors

Your Accounting for a New Economy

The Fountain of Youth: Attracting Younger Members to Your NFP Board

The search for eternal youth, which began with Spanish explorer Juan Ponce De Leon's celebrated expedition of Florida while in a hunt for legendary waters capable of restoring one's vitality, has been a valiant human endeavor that has continued to this day. While the search for personal eternal youth remains out of reach, it is possible to keep your not-for-profit organization youthful, and harness the exuberance that comes along with it, by making a determined effort to attract younger members to your Board, which will in turn attract younger supporters to your organization.

As the old adage goes – "You are only as old as you feel." The same is true for your not-for-profit organization. Any organization is made up of the sum of its parts, and the vast majority of most not-for-profit boards are staffed with older members. While older members tend to be very reliable, passionate, and generous; they also tend to be very set in their ways, and reluctant to change. For an organization to remain innovative and survive in today's competitive environment, it must have an infusion of young people capable of providing fresh perspectives, a healthy diversity of opinion, and allow you to cultivate the leadership of tomorrow.

The traditional way most not-for-profit organizations select members for their Board of Directors is through their strongest supporters, and leading donors. Doing things the traditional way doesn't always provide you with the freshest list of candidates.

To attract a different kind of candidate, you have to be prepared to do things differently.

Analyze your strengths and weaknesses

The first step to beginning new Board recruitment is to look at your current Board and identify its strengths and weaknesses. Examine each Board member and identify the skills and talents each brings to the table. Once you've identified the strengths of your current Board, it's much easier to identify your Board's weaknesses so you can find the proper candidates to fill in the gaps.

Promote from within

When beginning your search it's a good idea to look at internal candidates first. Candidates within your organization have many advantages over their external brethren. First, internal candidates have already demonstrated their commitment and passion for your cause. Second, they are already familiar with the internal politics of your organization and the challenges you face. And third, you already know their work ethic.

Internal candidates can encompass a more robust pool of talent than you may initially realize. Look beyond your volunteers to the staff of companies who work closely with your organization. For example, did you know the CPA's at Lane Gorman Trubitt, L.L.P. have a dedicated not-for-profit niche committed to serving worthy local causes and organizations? LGT encourages our young and talented team members to learn about the intricacies of the not-for-profit sector by serving on the Boards of many prominent organizations – And we can do the same for you!

Spread the word

Once you've decided to expand your search externally for candidates, the time has come to spread the word. Let people know that you are recruiting for your Board. Be sure to utilize all the traditional recruiting methods, such as newsletters, announcements, and word of mouth, but don't forget to take advantage of the technological avenues open to you as well.

Studies have shown that young professionals (30 years old and younger) do the majority of their research through online resources. Employ not-for-profit Board and volunteer recruiting sites. These can be tremendous resources, but don't neglect your own website. If your current website doesn't have a page listing volunteer and career opportunities – add one. Be descriptive. Explain the level of skills and commitment that you are seeking. Encourage your current Board members to share their experience working for your organization, and trumpet the benefits of Board membership – enhanced financial knowledge, resume building, networking opportunities, leadership development. This is your online presence and your opportunity to sell potential Board members on the opportunity.

Establish strong processes

Establish and maintain the process for Board member recruitment. Create a detailed and accurate job description for use on your website. Develop a board handbook to distribute to candidates so they know the requirements of the job and what will be expected of them. A recruitment committee can be a great way to cultivate ongoing recruitment efforts. You can also consider establishing an advisory group made up of several young professionals to help ease internal talent into leadership roles.

By following these simple steps your organization may be able to accomplish what the great Ponce De Leon failed to do – discover your organization's own fountain of youth capable of bringing new life to your Board of Directors and revitalize your organization as you head into the future.