ElevateNPT

Elevate Insights

October 2026

Leadership. Governance. Strategy. For nonprofits that want to excel.



From Seat-Fillers to Strategic Leaders:

Building the Board Your Organization Deserves

When a board seat opens, the conversation often begins with a familiar question: “Do we know anyone who might be willing to serve?”

That question may produce a name. It does not necessarily build the board the organization needs.

Many nonprofit boards are filled with people who care deeply about the mission. They attend meetings, listen to reports, and vote when asked. Their goodwill matters. But if the board's work stops there, the organization is missing much of the leadership a board can and should provide.

A strategic board helps shape the organization's direction. Its members bring knowledge of the community, useful expertise, relationships, and sound judgment. They ask tough questions: whether the organization has the resources to meet its goals, programs are generating targeted outcomes, and partnerships still make sense. They examine results and make decisions when circumstances change. They spend less time simply hearing what happened and more time considering what should happen next.

Board members are unpaid, but they are not "just volunteers." They have accepted a leadership role with legal, financial, and strategic responsibilities. The people who rely on the organization -and the people who invest in it - deserve a board that takes those responsibilities seriously. That starts before anyone is invited to join.

Recruit for the leadership your mission needs

When recruitment begins only after a vacancy appears, boards tend to look for someone available and agreeable. A stronger approach begins with the organization's strategy. If the next few years will require stronger financial oversight, new community partnerships, or a better understanding of the people served, what capabilities and perspectives does the board need to bring to those decisions?



Board Recruitment Matrix

BUILDING THE BOARD OUR MISSION NEEDS

Identify the skills, experience, and perspectives needed to advance your mission — and where recruitment should focus.

The goal is not just to fill vacancies. It is to build a well-rounded board with the right mix of talent, experience, and passion to lead your organization into the future.

Skills, Experience & Perspective	Board Member 1	Board Member 2	Board Member 3	Board Member 4	Board Member 5	Total Current	Ideal Number	Gap
Passion for Our Mission	●	●	●	◐	●	4.5	5	+0.5
Nonprofit Governance	●	○	●	○	●	3	4	+1
Finance / Accounting	●	●	○	○	●	3	4	+1
Fund Development	●	○	◐	○	○	1.5	4	+2.5
Marketing / Communications	○	●	○	◐	○	1.5	3	+1.5
Community Connections	●	◐	●	○	○	2.5	4	+1.5
Legal Expertise	○	○	●	○	○	1	2	+1
Technology / Data	○	◐	○	○	●	1.5	3	+1.5
Lived Experience	●	○	○	◐	○	1.5	3	+1.5
Diversity of Perspectives	●	●	◐	○	○	2.5	4	+1.5

● Strong ◐ Some ○ None

Use the gaps to guide intentional, mission-driven recruitment.

A board composition matrix can make those gaps visible. It can account for professional skills, fundraising ability, community connections, lived experience, and the ability to think strategically. The goal is not to collect impressive résumés. It is to assemble a group that can govern well together.

Recruitment should also be continuous. Getting to know potential members through committees, events, and conversations gives both the organization and the candidate time to assess the fit. When a seat opens, the board can make a thoughtful invitation instead of launching a hurried search.

And that invitation should be candid. Prospective members need to know what service requires: meeting attendance and preparation, committee work, learning about the organization, participation in fundraising, and time for difficult decisions. A person may care deeply about the mission and still be unable to make that commitment right now. Being honest about the role respects both the candidate and the organization.

Turn new members into contributing leaders

Recruitment alone will not create a strong board. New members need more than a packet of bylaws and financial statements. They need to understand the organization's priorities and challenges, how decisions are made, and where the board's responsibility ends and the executive director's begins. A board mentor and early opportunities for meaningful participation can help them put that understanding to work.

The board must make room for that work, too. Committees can examine issues and bring recommendations to the full board. Board meetings can use reports and performance data to focus discussion on decisions: What is changing? Where are we off track? What choices require board judgment?

Clear expectations make accountability possible. Members should know how their contributions will be assessed, and the board should be willing to review its own performance. Raising expectations may cause discomfort, especially where "we're all volunteers" has long been the response to requests for more engagement. Culture change takes honest conversation and sustained effort.

The point is not to demand more hours for their own sake. It is to use board members' time for the leadership work only they can do.

So before it is time to fill the next vacancy, ask a bigger question: **If our board were significantly stronger a year from now, what would be different for the organization?** The answer can guide whom you recruit, what you ask of them, and how you help the entire board grow.

Strong boards do not happen by accident. They are built intentionally—one expectation, one invitation, and one decision at a time.

NEXT MONTH: Gratitude and Opportunities: Reflections on What Deserves Our Appreciation — and Possibilitities in the Year Ahead.

LAST MONTH: From Passion to Perspective: Strengthening Strategic Thinking Skills In Board Leadership (read it HERE)

It's Not Too Late!

Register

STRONG BOARDS. CLEAR DIRECTION. STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP.

A Board Governance Series for Board Chairs and Executive Directors

Hosted by CF Community Foundation / United Way Volusia-Flagler

Presented by ElevateNPT

SESSIONS

Thursday, November 5
BUILDING THE BOARD: From Seat-Fillers to Strategic Leaders

Thursday, December 3
LEADING THE BOARD: How to Be the Board Chair Your Organization Needs

All sessions: 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

COST: $120 per leadership team per session | $60 per session for each additional person per session

LOCATION: The Community Foundation and United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties
1530 Cornerstone Blvd, Suite 210, Daytona Beach, FL 32114

Don't worry if you missed the first session in September. The sessions above are open for registration. Join us!

Why Strong Board Leadership Matters Now More than Ever

Strong Missions Inspire Trust. Strong Governance Sustains It.

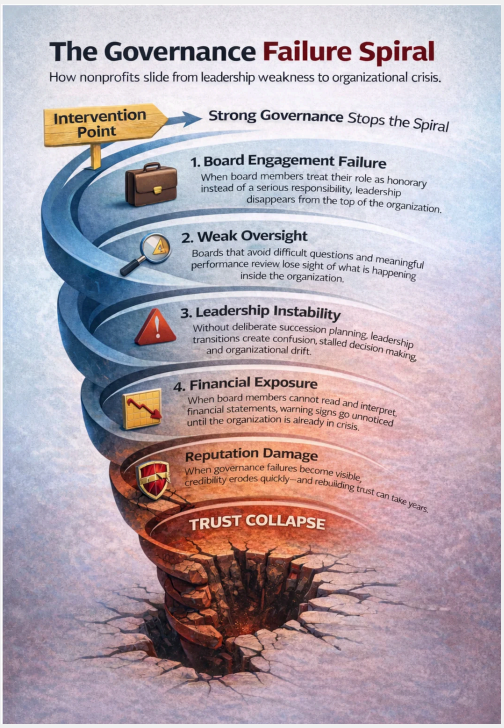
Public trust is one of the most valuable assets a nonprofit possesses. Without it, donors hesitate, volunteers disengage, and communities question whether an organization can deliver meaningful impact.

Nonprofits remain among the most trusted institutions in American society—but that trust cannot be taken for granted. Stakeholders increasingly expect organizations to demonstrate results, use resources responsibly, operate transparently, and hold leadership accountable.

That makes public trust a **governance issue**.

Boards shape whether an organization is seen as credible, transparent, and effective. When they provide strong oversight, ask difficult questions, understand the finances, evaluate leadership, plan for succession, and keep the organization focused on measurable impact, they protect both the mission and the public's confidence in it.

When they don't, the damage is rarely immediate. It begins quietly: disengaged board members, weak oversight, missed warning signs, leadership instability, and financial risk. Over time, those weaknesses can erode organizational credibility and, ultimately, public trust.



For boards, the message is straightforward: **good intentions are not enough.** Effective governance requires engaged board members who understand their responsibilities and are willing to exercise them.

Want to dig deeper? Read Public Trust and Nonprofit Governance: Why Strong Board Leadership Matters More Than Ever.

Become a Stronger Board Member—and a Stronger Leader at Work

Effective nonprofit board service requires a meaningful investment of time, energy, and judgment. One of the best ways organizations can honor that commitment is to invest consistently in board development—helping members build skills that benefit both the nonprofit and their own professional lives.

Learning to govern effectively strengthens skills that matter in any workplace: asking better questions, interpreting financial information, weighing competing priorities, and considering the long-term consequences of decisions. These abilities help board members look beyond their

immediate responsibilities, connect their work to broader goals, and make more thoughtful, informed decisions.

Effective governance also means working with people who bring different experiences, perspectives, and priorities. Board members must listen carefully, challenge assumptions respectfully, navigate disagreement, and build agreement around a shared direction. Because authority rests with the board collectively, members learn to lead through influence—a valuable skill whether they are managing a team, collaborating across departments, or advocating for change.

These benefits take intention. Board members who participate in training, seek feedback, and put new skills into practice can bring stronger judgment, greater confidence, and more effective leadership back to their own work. Investing in board development strengthens the organization while giving members something valuable in return: skills they can use throughout their careers.

Ready to invest in your board's growth? ElevateNPT provides customized education to strengthen strategic thinking, effective governance, and leadership. Start with a complimentary 30-minute consultation to discuss your needs and explore how we can help you build the leadership team your organization needs.

Schedule a Call Today

Check Out Our Complimentary Resources

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