



## Considerations Before Joining a Board

Serving as a board member is one of the most challenging and rewarding of volunteer assignments. While appointment or election to a board is an honor, board members have important legal and fiduciary responsibilities that require a commitment of time, skill, and resources. Prospective board members do themselves a service, and show that they are serious about the commitments they make, by asking some basic questions before joining an organization's board.

### **Ask the following questions about the organization's programs:**

- What is the organization's mission?
- How do its current programs relate to the mission?
- Can I visit the organization to observe a program firsthand?
- Does the organization have a strategic plan that is reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis?

### **Ask the following questions about the organization's financial status**

- Is the financial condition of the organization sound?
- Does the board discuss and approve the annual budget?
- How often do board members receive financial reports?

### **Ask the following questions about the structure of the board:**

- How is the board structured?
- Are there descriptions of the responsibilities of the board as a whole and of individual board members?
- Who are the other board members?
- Is there a system of checks and balances to prevent conflicts of interest between board members and the organization?
- Does the organization have directors and officers liability coverage?

### **Ask the following questions about individual board members' responsibilities:**

- What are the ways that you think I can contribute as a board member?
- How much of my time will be required for meetings and special events?
- How are committee assignments made?
- What orientation will I receive to the organization and to the responsibilities of board service?
- Does the organization provide opportunities for board development and education?
- What is the board's role in fund-raising?
- Will I be expected to make a specific annual financial contribution?
- What role will I play in soliciting donors?

### **Evaluate Your Interest in Serving on the Board**

Once you are satisfied with the information you have received, it is time to evaluate your own interest in serving on the board. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I committed to the mission of the organization?
- Can I contribute the time necessary to be an effective board member?
- Am I comfortable with the approach and tone of the organization's fund-raising efforts?
- Can I contribute financial support consistent with the organization's expectations of board members and with my own means and priorities?
- Can I place the organization's purposes and interests above my own professional and personal interests when making decisions as a board member?

### **Background Material**

Selected background information can provide a useful overview of the organization, the board's work, and the responsibilities of board members. Helpful material includes:

- A list of current board members, titles, and all affiliation
- A description of board members' responsibilities
- A board organization chart
- The organization's newsletter, brochure, or other publications
- Newspaper or magazine articles about the organization