

Questions to Ask Before Joining a Board

Joining a nonprofit board can be a deeply rewarding experience—personally, professionally, and civically. But not every board opportunity is the right fit for every person. This guide can help you reflect on your motivations and evaluate a board’s structure, culture, and expectations to make an informed decision.

Use the following checklist to guide conversations and decision-making as you assess whether a particular board role is right for you.

Mission/Motivation:

- Am I passionate about the mission of the organization?
- Does the mission align with my personal and/or professional interests?
- Do I have a personal connection to the issues the organization addresses?
- Can I serve as a strong ambassador for this organization?

Personal Contribution & Skills:

- What skills, experiences, or networks can I contribute to the board?
- Will this role allow me to grow, make meaningful connections, or contribute to something I care about?
- Will I be working alongside others committed to solving problems?

Time, Terms & Commitment:

- What is the expected time commitment for meetings, preparation, and other board activities?
- How long are the terms of service?
- Are meetings scheduled at times that work for me?
- Is participating on a committee expected? If so, what is the time commitment?
- What committees exist, and will I be able to choose one or be assigned?

Board Operations & Governance:

- How does the board operate?
- Does the board regularly meet quorum requirements?

- Are materials provided in advance to support meaningful participation?
- Are the board's bylaws and job descriptions current and reflective of actual expectations?

Strategic & Financial Oversight

- Does the organization have a strategic plan? Is the board involved in shaping or reviewing it?
- Is the organization on sound financial footing?
- Are financial statements and audit results regularly shared with the board?
- Are there sufficient internal financial controls?
- Does the board have Directors and Officers (D&O) Liability Insurance?

Culture & Leadership:

- Does the board culture seem welcoming and collaborative?
- Does the board function as a team and prepare well for meetings?
- Does the organization's chief executive (e.g., Executive Director or CEO) appear to be a capable leader I can support?
- Do staff members seem competent and effective in their roles?
- Is the board committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in its membership and decision-making?

Fundraising & Financial Contributions:

- Are board members expected to make a personal financial contribution? If so, is there a suggested or required amount?
- What is the board's role in fundraising efforts (e.g., donor engagement, hosting events, making asks)?

Reputation & Community Impact:

- Does the organization have a positive reputation in the community?
- Are the issues it addresses important and relevant to me and the broader community?

Final Reflection:

- Given all of the above, what is my gut feeling about joining this board?