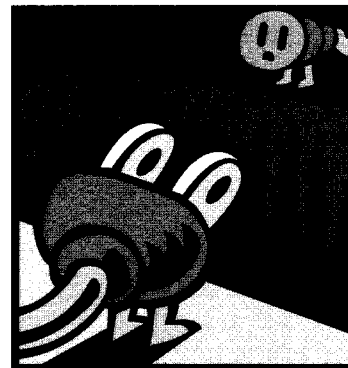


THE BOARD MARKETPLACE PROGRAM

WHAT IT IS

A Board Marketplace Program (BMP) is a community-wide initiative that opens two-way communication between local boards and interested people who wish to serve on them.

Increasingly, communities across the country are recognizing the need for better communication between their nonprofit boardrooms and their diverse sources of local leadership. Most towns and counties have social and civic groups, businesses and professional associations, churches and synagogues, leadership programs, alumni associations and service organizations — all rich sources of potential board members. Historically, however, these groups have not proactively shared the considerable skills and experience of their members with neighboring nonprofit boards. Until now, that is.



Why are communities beginning to develop Board Marketplace Programs? Perhaps it's because they always took for granted that nonprofit boards had all the members they needed and now they see that they don't. Or perhaps it's because our communities are starting to examine how people get into boardrooms. Or maybe our nation, as a whole, is finally recognizing how important the responsible selection of nonprofit board members can be to a community's well being. That process should be an empowering one for non-profit board and potential board member alike — open, informative, easily understood, affirmative!

WHERE IT BEGAN

Recognizing the need for a positive, actionable process that linked boards with potential members grew out of a national fact finding study conducted by the Volunteer Consulting Group (VCG).

With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Rauch Foundation, VCG conducted over 200 interviews in Atlanta, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Palm Beach County (FL), Santa Clara County (CA) and the Grand Traverse Area of Michigan. The purpose of these interviews, conducted from 1991 to 1993, was to investigate a problem VCG had been grappling with for years in New York: how to open access between nonprofit boards and prospective trustees so they could readily find each other. The study concluded that there is a need for a community-wide mechanism to tap into the supply of potential board members in order to meet the increasing demand for board leadership from community boardrooms. In short, a system by which supply can readily meet demand.

“The challenge is to locally mobilize individuals who represent the richness of the community—to help them learn about being a board member and have all their differences represent a pluralism in the common cause. Because the great challenges—as we deal with some of the more complex and perplexing problems in society today and in the future—are going to be dealt with by citizen boards if they are to be addressed effectively at all.”

-Foundation Executive

“People won’t
realize we need
the Board
Marketplace
Program until
after we have it.”
-Community Leader

WHAT WE HEARD

. . . from nonprofit boards

“We want more diversity. Help us find candidates outside of our board’s friendship circle.”

“There are too many artists on this board. Help us find a banker.”

“Our finance committee could really use a chief financial officer.”

“We are expanding our programs and need a board member who understands how to work with our educational system.”

“We need a trustee with marketing expertise.”

. . . from potential board members

“I want to serve, but what kind of board needs someone like me?”

“My interest is at-risk children. Help me understand the organizations that serve them.”

“How do I do this? Should I interview them or are they interviewing me?”

The study also uncovered social and psychological issues that keep boards from reaching out to new members and retaining them. These barriers include:

- A distrust of newcomers.
- Minimal mentoring of new board members.
- Insufficient board human resource practices and orientation basics (job descriptions, performance reviews, rotation, etc.).

From the perspective of potential board members, three major issues inhibit their pursuing board participation:

- Many talented individuals never think of themselves as being “board member material.”
- It feels awkward or unseemly to offer yourself to a board on which you wish to serve.
- Many lack familiarity with board group process—where consensus-building skills are more effective than traditional authoritarian leadership.

For complete information on these barriers, please see Appendix II: *The Case for Change—Why Nonprofit Boards and Trustees Can’t Find Each Other.*



HOW IT WORKS

When fully established, a Board Marketplace Program:

- Promotes awareness of the need and opportunity for nonprofit board service.
- Helps individuals explore their interests and review board opportunities in a proactive process.
- Assists Chairs and Executive/Artistic Directors to clarify the skills and qualifications desirable in new trustees, and find individuals who meet these board needs.
- Educates boards and potential board members about the role of a board and the responsibilities of board members.
- Manages expectations on all sides.
- Directs all aspects of the recruitment/ placement process with diplomacy and professionalism.
- Follows up and evaluates each placement.
- Maintains a computerized data bank—of organizations in need of board members and individuals willing to serve—in a central location.

For potential board members, a BMP is innovative because it . . .

- Enables individuals to actively seek a nonprofit board on which to serve rather than passively waiting to be found by a board.
- Helps to determine what kind of board best suits a person's interests and aids in researching and approaching a specific board.
- Coaches candidates on how to effectively gather information to make an informed decision.
- Arranges and attends introductory meetings.
- Offers perspective on some of the all-too-human challenges one confronts on entering a board.



And, a BMP helps boards find board members by:

- Assisting in the articulation of board needs, including the creation of board member job descriptions.
- Providing the opportunity to find interested, qualified individuals with the required skills, experience and resources.
- Facilitating the process by sending organizational information to potential board members, following up with candidates and attending introductory meetings.

“There are a lot of talented, successful people who want to serve on boards, give something back. But they have the same kind of fears so many of us have. It is unfamiliar territory to them.”

—Head of Business Association



A unique aspect of a Board Marketplace Program is its ability to reach out to potential board members who may never have thought of themselves as such. A BMP helps these individuals proactively reach out to boards that serve worthwhile causes of special interest. It is this connection to the special interest of potential members that motivates them to “knock on the door” of nonprofit boardrooms *before* these boards have requested new members.

Another BMP innovation is the coordinated use of “bridges”. Bridges are all types of individuals who can introduce prospective board members to nonprofit organizations, access a broad range of leadership resources including untapped minority communities, and bring nonprofit organizations searching for new board members to the BMP.



Bridges In to the Marketplace — bring potential board candidates into the BMP and include representatives from:

- Colleges and universities
- Community leaders
- Corporations and businesses
- Direct service volunteer programs
- Leadership programs
- Local business groups
- Professional and civic associations
- Service clubs
- Synagogues and churches
- University alumni groups



Bridges out of the Marketplace — provide information about, and access to, potential board placement and recruitment opportunities which include:

- Arts councils
- Community foundations
- Ethnic and religious federations
- Executive/Artistic Directors and Chairs
- Foundation and corporate philanthropists
- Public agencies that fund entitlement programs
- Technical assistance programs
- The United Way and alternative funds
- Umbrella and membership groups

Certainly many of the bridges listed above have traditionally relied on relationships to informally introduce new trustees to boards *within their own network*. The unique challenge for a BMP is to link bridges *across* networks. In other words, a community-wide program needs to identify leadership from diverse sources and facilitate the introduction of these individuals to boards serving community needs in health, culture, social services, community development, advocacy and education. Trust is a critical component of formalizing this collaborative bridge network. No one person or organization could ever possess, or inspire, trust in every boardroom or leadership source. However, by linking diverse boards and the people who might serve them, BMP's bridges form a community-wide trust network.



