

# ChangeMakers @ Work

A Corporate Citizenship Webinar Series

## PREPARING EMPLOYEES FOR NON-PROFIT BOARD SERVICE

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**Moderator:** Elizabeth Dove, Director, Corporate Citizenship, Volunteer Canada

**Presenters:** Moira Taylor, Executive-in-Residence at Capacity Canada and Joanna Lohrenz, Vice President Customer Experience, Manulife Canada

Non-profit Board service is a wonderful leadership opportunity, building and sharing skills and perspective, while allowing individuals to support a cause they care about in their community. CSR practitioners are often the ones in their company approached by employees and executives for information on finding a Board position. How can CSR practitioners support employees who are interested in serving on a NFP Board? Where can individuals find Board training and resources in their community?

*Moira Taylor, Executive-in-Residence at Capacity Canada* began with a review of some of the responsibilities of a non-profit Board, reinforcing the obligation to always act in the best interests of the organization:

- Provide organization with strategic direction
- Monitor performance of organization and the Executive Director/CEO
- Provide financial and risk oversight
- Manage governance system and Board processes
- Delegate operations to Executive Director/CEO
- Master distinction between operations and governance

Boards have a fiduciary responsibility in three areas: Duty of Care; Duty of Loyalty; and Duty of Obedience. These duties include acting honestly; placing organization's interests first; knowing and obeying the laws. In addition, the Board must understand the budget, capital, and investment status of organization, provide oversight of insurance and audit, provide performance reporting and monitoring and develop governance policies.

But what makes a good Board member?

- Acts in the best interest of the organization
- Uses good judgement in decision-making
- Keeps current on relevant issues
- Attends meetings regularly and comes prepared
- Participates and makes a significant contribution
- Asks questions
- Understands decisions can only be made as a group
- Understands that Board speaks with One Voice

Moira suggested that when assisting an employee with finding a Board placement, start by asking what the employee is passionate about and what they are not interested in. Other key points for employees considering joining a non profit Board include:

- Are you passionate about the cause of the non-profit?
- What is reputation of the non-profit?

- Are you attracted to a well-run, high-functioning organization, or, would you prefer to work with an organization in crisis?
- Review the non-profit's website
- Review the most recent annual reports and audited statements
- Consider the current Board membership
- Take a look at organization's charitable listing on CRA website

One way to better understand a prospective Board and to see if it is a good fit, is to have a conversation with a current Board member. Here are some key points to ask before joining a Board:

- What time commitment is involved in being on the Board?
- How frequently does the Board meet?
- What is the length of terms of office?
- Are Board members expected to fundraise for the organization?
- What outstanding crises or liabilities does the Board have?
- Do Board members have access to ongoing Board governance training?
- Does the organization have a strategic plan, and when was it last updated?

If there is no open Board position at an organization you are interested in, joining a committee of the Board is a great way to get an introduction to the organization, the Board, and its work. It's also a good way for the organization and the Board to get to know you.

*Joanna Lohrenz, Vice President Customer Experience, Manulife Canada* shared her experience with Capacity Canada's MatchBoard program from the CSR perspective. The MatchBoard program pairs employees with non-profit boards of directors that align with their interests, skills and expertise.

The MatchBoard program is a Win-Win-Win for the employer, the employee, and the non-profit:

- The employer builds a culture of generosity and community engagement
- The employee gains leadership and transferable skills while contributing to social good
- The non-profit gains strategic talents that grow the capacity of the organization

Participants in the MatchBoard program reported these benefits of their Board service:

- 96% of employees report significant expansion to their networks
- 94% of employees report that they gained experience relevant to their jobs
- 92% of employees reported a gain in transferable skills
- 88% of employees feel they are making a meaningful contribution to a non-profit

There are many ways to connect employee volunteers to training and resources to assist in finding a rewarding Board service opportunity include:

- Board matching organizations like [Capacity Canada](#), [B3](#) and [onBoard Canada](#)
- Workshops at local volunteer centres in cities and regions across Canada for example:
- Board training resources like the 20 Questions series from Chartered Professional Accountants Canada

The CSR practitioner can play a key role in engaging and preparing employees for fulfilling non-profit Board service experiences that match their skills and interests with the needs of a non profit organization. Board service is a rewarding way to make a positive impact in your community.

For more Corporate Citizenship resources, click [here](#).

Access the Webinar recording [here](#).

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## Q & A

*Q. What is the most common way to find a Board position: are individuals invited to join or is there an application process?*

A. In previous years, individuals were invited to join a Board, but today most organizations advertise and recruit Board members according to a skills and abilities matrix. Boards should consider the following when recruiting for open Board positions: who does the organization serve; what does the organization do; and what specific skills or expertise are needed in Board members?

*Q. What is the role of the employer once the employee is matched with a non profit Board?*

A. The support role of the employer will depend on the company. At Manulife, because of their relationship with Capacity Canada, it is Capacity Canada that provides training and support, more than Manulife. Ordinarily, an employer is not obliged to take any role after an employee joins a board.

*Q. In some cases, non-profit organizations assume that an individual wants to use their professional skills in their Board role (i.e. Asking an accountant to be the Board Treasurer). How can employees ensure they are communicating that they may not be the best fit for the finance role?*

A. This is not an uncommon issue. An individual applying for a Board position (or any volunteer role) should clearly identify and communicate their interest in the organization, the type of role they would like to have and the specific skills they would like to share, or not share. This reinforces the importance of the application and interview processes. Organizations should also remember to ask the individual about their interests and what role the individual would like to have. Clear and honest communication can help ensure a rewarding match for both the volunteer and the organization.

*Q. Is a charity legally required to hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM)?*

A. The following is taken from the AGM process under the [Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act](#):  
“...the prescribed period is not later than 15 months after the last preceding annual meeting but not later than six months after the end of the corporation’s preceding financial year.”

*Q. How do you view charities that don’t have formal committees?*

A. Board committees are not a requirement and Boards can work well without committees. In some cases, the size of a Board will determine if there are board committees. Remember that all Board and committee discussions require the same level of confidentiality. Joining a committee is a great introduction to a Board role.