Giving 2.0™ Guide: Key Questions When Considering Joining a Board

The following questions and considerations are adapted from Giving 2.0: Transform Your Giving and Our World by Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen (Wiley: Jossey-Bass, 2012)

What type of board are you thinking of joining—a fundraising, a titular, a working, a governing board, etc.?

What is the explicit role of the board and does the board inform decision-making? Does the board have a say in the organization’s decision-making?

How many meetings take place each year? What additional contributions (in time, money, etc.) are expected of each board member? Are you in a position to meet those expectations?

Can you see previous board agendas to assess the role and function of the board? How much of the board’s time was actually spent on strategic decision-making?

Can you talk to current or past board members, attend a meeting or both? What do current/past board members say is the board’s greatest area for improvement?

Does the board have a “give or get” policy, requiring board members to either give a minimum amount of money themselves or to raise an equivalent sum from others? Make sure you are in a position to meet those fundraising expectations.

Are board members expected to give names and addresses of friends to the organization? Are you comfortable and prepared to do this? (This is often a requirement of serving on an event committee or chairing an event.)

What are the board’s strategic plans for the year? How is the board measuring the success of those goals? Does the board have a self-assessment process?

What is the board’s annual process for assessing the performance of the CEO or executive director?

What are the fiduciary responsibilities of the board, and what is the oversight process for managing and allocating organizational resources transparently and effectively?
Does the board have term limits? What does succession planning look like on the board? What is the board explicitly doing to attract members with diverse backgrounds and experiences? How often does the organization create a strategic plan and what is the board’s role, if any, in this process?

Does the organization have directors and officers (D&O) insurance to protect board members in the event of a legal dispute?

Will you have time outside of board meetings to support, advise and work with the organization’s staff? Is that an expectation of board members?

What additional responsibilities are required of board members outside of board meetings (e.g., are board members expected to serve on one or more board committees as well)? Are you in a position to commit that additional time?

What does the community say about the organization? If possible, ask 5 to 10 people from the community about the organization’s work before you join the board.

Are you prepared to introduce 10 of your friends to the organization? Board members should be ambassadors of an organization. It’s a good idea to join a board only if you feel comfortable doing this.