

What's in a Board? Non-Profits Need You to Lead Your Community

Whatever cause really matters to you, there is a non-profit that could use your knowledge and experience.

by Stacy Ashton

What images cross your mind when you think Board of Directors? A long mahogany table surrounded by severe faces? Non-Profit Board Directors are people just like the rest of us—people who are passionate and committed to helping their communities thrive. Called “leadership volunteers,” those who serve on Boards and Board Committees of the 161,000 non-profit organizations in Canada are the heart and soul of the non-profit sector. Almost half of all Canadian volunteers (41%) have served on a Board or Committee in a non-profit organization. In a reversal of leadership statistics in other arenas, most Canadian leadership volunteers are women (53%).¹

But there are more Board seats to fill than people to fill them. Non-profit organizations are crying out for volunteers to step into leadership roles. A national survey of Canadian non-profits found that 56% of non-profits were finding it difficult to fill their Board of Director positions.²

Why the gap? Stacy Ashton of Community Volunteer Connections in the Lower Mainland thinks most people just aren't aware that Boards exist. “Most people—even those volunteering on the front lines of an organization—don't realize that it is volunteers who ultimately guide and oversee the non-profit organization. Even those who do know about Boards may think it's above them somehow, but Boards keep non-profits grounded in their community, so what organizations are really looking for are people who believe in the organization and want to see it succeed.”

When you talk to people who are serving on Boards, you find out that being involved makes life more meaningful: “It's been very moving,” says one Board Director of an international organization, “I thought it was going to be intellectual work, but it's like it went from the brain to the heart.”

Stacey Rigby, Board Chair at Step-By-Step Child Development Society says:

¹ Board Volunteers in Canada: Their Motivations and Challenges. Imagine Canada. (2006)

² National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO)
<www.nonprofitscan.ca> (Spring 2004)

“ Volunteering as a board member has shown me how “not for profit” agencies work. I’ve seen the great services they provide and the many challenges they face and I’ve grown from being a part of both. ”

Non-profits are looking across the spectrum to today’s youth and retirees to help fill up their Boards with much needed energy and experience. “I was a workaholic all my life,” says one retiree who is actively volunteering on several boards, “and my friends told me I’d be dead in six months if I didn’t keep busy! I decided I had lots left to do, so I found places to volunteer.”

For youth, Jill Cook of the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce points out that being on a Board is a great experience to add to a resume. “Employers like to see Board experience on resumes—it shows a commitment to community and an ability to work at a leadership table.”

Whatever cause really matters to you, there is a non-profit that focuses on it. Interested in caring for seniors? Teaching children the joys of art? Providing food for the hungry? Helping people with disabilities enjoy life to the fullest? Supporting local businesses and seeing them succeed? Keeping our environment clean and green? With your help, non-profit organizations

can make our communities thrive.

In the TriCities, Community Volunteer Connections, ArtsConnect, and the TriCities Chamber of Commerce are experimenting with a new way of connecting interested leadership volunteers with Boards looking for new people. BoardDATE is a fun way to meet active Board members and learn about what it means to be on a Board, over wine and cheese event based loosely on speed dating.

“Joining a Board is embarking on a new relationship, so you want to make sure there’s a good fit from the start,” says Ms. Ashton. “Meeting the people behind the organizations is inspiring—and we hope it will help potential new Board members fall in love with the possibilities.”

If you’re from the Tri-Cities and want to learn more about leadership volunteering, sign up for a BoardDATE seminar through the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce.

**604.464.2716 or info@tricitieSchamber.com
Visit www.tricitieSchamber.com for more info.**

Try BoardMatch.org an online “matching” service that provides an orientation to being on a Board and connects you to hundreds of non-profits seeking Board Members across Canada.

**You can also contact:
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