

# Get on board: a resource for women

## Why get on board

People join boards for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they are looking for a way to give back to their community, or champion a cause they are passionate about. Others see it as an opportunity to stretch themselves, or even shape programs and policies that affect a broader audience.

Sitting on boards have numerous rewards both personally and professionally. Boards can often be supportive environments to gain new experiences and develop new skills.

This resource reviews board basics, the importance and benefits of board service for women and some fundamental considerations before you take on a board challenge.

## Women's representation on boards

Studies show that women are underrepresented in many areas of leadership, including representation on boards. It is important for women to be involved on boards as women bring:

- different knowledge and experiences broadening input, opinions, ideas, and approaches
- unique perspectives on the needs and views of a significant proportion of board stakeholders
- new connections

In addition, gender diversity at the board table can enhance return on investment. (Source: Catalyst)

## Board benefits for women

Boards can lead to rewarding experiences with positive impacts for women:

### **Gain new skills, experiences and knowledge**

Boards can be excellent training grounds to build skillsets, which are transferable to other areas of your life.

Boards also provide opportunities to:

- get hands-on practice in a variety of areas
- gain exposure on how other sectors function
- make decisions influencing the direction and management of organizations

### **Develop leadership muscle**

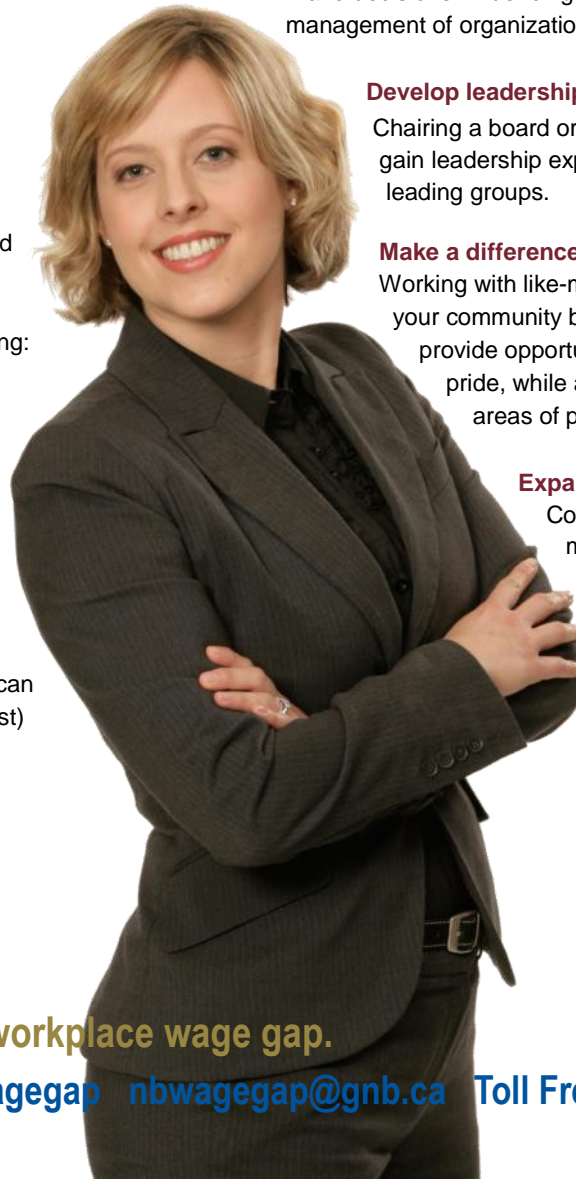
Chairing a board or committee is a great way to gain leadership experience and build confidence in leading groups.

### **Make a difference serving the community**

Working with like-minded people to help those in your community brings many rewards. Boards can provide opportunities for civic involvement and pride, while allowing you to choose your areas of passion.

### **Expand your networks**

Connections with other board members, who bring a broad range of insights and perspectives, can have lasting, positive personal and professional rewards.



# Board FAQ

**Serving on a nonprofit board can enhance career development:**

*“It’s a wonderful way to learn at the same time as giving something back. Most of the time, you’re forced into one or the other of those roles. It’s not very often in life that you get that opportunity to do both.”*

*~ Linda Crompton, President and CEO of BoardSource*

## What is a board?

A board is a body of elected or appointed members and is responsible to oversee the operations of the organization and ensure its long term sustainability.

Boards are sometimes referred to by other names, including boards of trustees or governors, committees and governing councils.

## What do boards do?

- Ensure legal and fiduciary accountability
- Advocate causes and rights
- Develop policies
- Create change
- Deliver services
- Ensure proper resources to achieve goals
- Ensure stakeholder needs are met by the organization
- Strengthen communities
- Raise funds
- Lobby

## What’s the difference? “profit” vs. “non-profit” boards

All corporations (profit or not-for-profit / non-profit) must have a governing board of directors.

Profit	Non-profit
Owned by stockholders	Owned by public
Generates money for owners	Serves the public
Success = making a profit	Success = meeting public needs
Board is usually paid	Board is usually volunteer
Money earned over and above expenses is kept as profit and distributed to owners	Money earned over expenses is retained as surplus and spent to meet public needs
Usually not exempt from taxes (federal, provincial and local)	Can be exempt from taxes if granted tax-exempt status

## How do boards function?

A board functions based on how it was formed, the roles it carries out, governing documents, and by-laws (constitution or Articles of Incorporation / Association).

Boards follow established rules which typically include:

- the board’s decision making boundaries
- number of members and length of their terms
- office holders’ positions, roles and responsibilities
- election or appointment of members
- procedures to fill irregular vacancies
- meeting requirements, rules and procedures

## What roles do members play?

Responsibility depends on organizational size, type and funding:

**Profit corporations and large funded non-profits** usually have paid staff for day-to-day operational management allowing board members to focus on high-level issues.

**Many non-profits** operate on a smaller scale, thus members take on more day-to-day management tasks in addition to playing a high-level, strategic role. Volunteers may perform duties in lieu of paid staff.

Board members:

- authorize major decisions
- set long-term goals
- finalize budgets and allocates funds
- set and monitor performance
- take responsibility for legal, financial and compliance matters

## Who's on the board?

Boards require a mix of skills and have several defined roles.

General board members attend meetings regularly; comment and vote on key decisions; advocate for the organization; participate on board committees; etc.

Additional board positions may include, but are not limited to, the following:

### Chair

- spokesperson who provides leadership to ensure effectiveness
- ensures proper participation of board members
- manages meetings and documentation of proceedings including dissemination of information

### Vice or Assistant Chair

- supports the chair and fills in when the chair is absent
- plays a major role in board leadership

### Secretary

- ensures accuracy of board records
- prepares and distributes meeting agendas and takes minutes ensuring legal compliance

### Treasurer

- monitors financials and keeps board updated
- presents the annual budget for approval, annual audits, etc.
- ensures financial reports are available as appropriate

\*Larger boards often establish committees for specific areas (finance, PR, etc.) and may have committee chairs.

## Did you know?

- *Over 40% of public companies have no women board directors*
- *17% of Canada's major 100 companies have no female directors*
- *In 2007, women held only 13% of FP500 board seats*
- *At the current pace, women will hold less than one-fifth of board seats in 2020*

Source: Catalyst

## Finding the right board

There are many boards to choose from that reflect a myriad of missions and activities. The size, type and age of a board can impact a member's role and experience. Finding the right board for you is important to ensure a positive experience.

Serving on a board requires you to keep the best interests of an organization in mind and often champion their cause. Therefore, it is important to be passionate about or believe in what the organization does and why it exists.

To determine which board is right for you it is important to understand all expectations, required commitments as well as assessing your own motivation and strengths. Below are a few considerations:

- Why do you want to be on a board?
- What are you passionate about?
- What are your core values?
- What issues in your community concern you?
- How much time can you commit?
- What types of past experiences have you enjoyed?
- What board activities interest you?
- Is board service right for you?
- Do you want to build new skills or share current expertise?

It may also be helpful to volunteer with an organization to learn more about its mission, structure, and board while exploring your passion for its work.

## Finding board opportunities

Finding board opportunities resembles a job search to an extent. Use a variety of ways to search and announce your interest in board service:

- Talk to family, friends and colleagues about your interests and intentions of serving on a board
- Look for opportunities through local volunteers groups and organizations
- Expand your networks; get involved in your community and "try out" organizations that interest you
- Talk to organizations for which you volunteer or donate; they will often look to these sources for members
- Search online, visit: [www.gnb.ca](http://www.gnb.ca) (Employment tab, select Agencies, Boards and Commissions, select Current Opportunities )

Most boards do not have specific qualifications, however certain skill sets such as: legal, finance, marketing, communications, and technical skills, are often in demand.

## Ready to get on board?

### STEP 1

Decide if board service is right for you

### STEP 2

Discover what you're passionate about and what you want out of serving on a board

### STEP 3

Find a board that aligns with your passion, needs, energy, etc.

### STEP 4

Ask questions and do your homework!

## Be prepared

Background information on an organization can help you make an informed decision. You might request:

- an annual report
- minutes from several meetings
- the most recent audited financial statement
- any long term strategic plans
- a list of board members, titles, and affiliations
- a description of member responsibilities
- a board and staff organizational chart
- printed publications
- media kits or any recent news articles
- a brief biography of the CEO and/or Executive Director
- a meeting with the Board Chair or CEO of the organization

Most boards have a screening process to protect the organization, its finances, and the community it serves. Screening may include interviews, reference and/or criminal background checks. Ask about the process.

**For additional resources on boards visit our website at:**  
[www.gnb.ca/wagegap](http://www.gnb.ca/wagegap)

### **Sources for this guide as of January 2011:**

- [www.boarddevelopment.org](http://www.boarddevelopment.org)
- [www.pxw1.snb.ca/snb7001/e/2000/2500e.asp](http://www.pxw1.snb.ca/snb7001/e/2000/2500e.asp)
- [www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/chrts/pplyng/gdc](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/chrts/pplyng/gdc)
- [www.managementhelp.org](http://www.managementhelp.org)
- [www.caaws.ca](http://www.caaws.ca)
- [www.boardsource.org](http://www.boardsource.org)
- [www.bridgestar.org/Library/FindBoardPosition.aspx](http://www.bridgestar.org/Library/FindBoardPosition.aspx)

## Is board service right for me?

Ask questions to build a better picture of why the organization exists, how it functions, what role you will play and even why a board vacancy exists.

### Questions to ask the board:

1. What is the organization's mission and whom does it serve?
2. Why do you want me on the board?
3. What will my responsibilities be?
4. How much time is required of a board member?
5. Who else is on the board and what are their backgrounds?
6. Are there descriptions of the responsibilities of the board as a whole, as well as committees and individual board members?
7. What orientation will I receive to the organization and to the responsibilities of board service?
8. What information or support will be available to assist me to do my job as a board member?
9. What outcomes have your efforts produced as a board?
10. Are the organization's clients or constituencies satisfied with the organization?
11. Is the board satisfied with the performance of the executive staff and what is the working relationship like?
12. Does the organization have a strategic plan that is reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis?
13. Is there a system of checks and balances to prevent conflicts of interest between board members and the organization?
14. How financially viable is the organization?
15. Is there a requirement for board members to contribute financially to the organization?
16. Has there been any litigation, or complaints about the board?
17. Does the board offer insurance for its members?
18. Do you provide assistance with travel, parking, or other incidental expenses?
19. Can I visit the organization to observe a program first-hand?
20. Can I speak with others who have volunteered with the organization in the past?

### Questions to ask yourself:

1. Can I make the organization one of my top investments in terms of the time, energy, and resources I will need to devote to it?
2. Can I add value to this board? Am I a suitable candidate based on skills required/sought?
3. Is this a supportive organization? Do I have special circumstances and will my needs be met? Is the board open and accepting?
4. What do I want out of this experience and will my expectations be met?
5. Can I hold this position with integrity and without conflicts of interest? (business or personal)
6. Am I comfortable with the reputation and track record of the Executive Director?
7. Has the board set clear and achievable goals?
8. Am I committed to the mission of the organization? Do I share their goals and values?
9. Is the work of the organization interesting to me?
10. How willing would I be to introduce others to the work of the organization?

### Want to know more? Contact us!

Visit our website at: [www.gnb.ca/wagegap](http://www.gnb.ca/wagegap)

Or contact us by calling 1-877-253-0266 or email us at [nbwagegap@gnb.ca](mailto:nbwagegap@gnb.ca)