Questions to Ask Candidates for the Board
A reprint from Blue Avocado

by Jan Masaoka

Board committees charged with recruiting new members often meet with potential board candidates over lunch to allow both sides to become more acquainted with each other. The following questions can help the board committee and the candidate see whether there’s a good match.

Frequently a first meeting with a prospective board member is set up for lunch or coffee with a current board member and the executive director. It’s a good idea to state clearly at the beginning that this is a “get-to-know-you” meeting and that no decisions need to be made before the meeting ends. Usually a follow-up call with the candidate confirms whether or not he or she is still interested in joining the board, and, if so, the candidate’s nomination is brought to the next board meeting for approval.

An alternative process is to have profiles of several candidates brought to the board. Board members choose those they are quite certain they would like to recruit. The board then authorizes the nominating committee or other group to meet with the candidates and allows the nominating committee to add individuals to the list from the board. This shortens the screening process and a new board member can often go to his or her first meeting within weeks of being asked. In either process, it’s important not to let months go by between when the candidates are asked and when they can attend their first meeting—in short, months after their interest has been sparked.

Questions to ask prospective board members:

- What interests you about our organization? Which aspect of our organization interests you most?
- What are some of your previous volunteer experiences or leadership roles? What are the kinds of circumstances in which you are most effective?
- What appeals to you about board service as a volunteer activity?
- What are you hoping to get out of your board experience?
- What skills, training, resources, and expertise do you feel you have to offer?
- One of the reasons we’re talking to you about possibly joining our board is
because we think you can help us connect with other public school parents in the African American community. Are these connections you could help us make?

Do you have any worries about joining the board?

If fundraising is an important activity for board members, be sure to raise it now:

- We’re hoping that if you join our board, you’ll be a member of the fundraising committee. In fact, we hope that you will be able to ask five or ten of your friends for contributions of over $1,000 each. Is this something you think you could do?
- What would you need from this organization to make this experience a successful one for you?

Questions you should be prepared to answer, if the candidate asks you:

- Why are you interested in me as a board member?
- What role do you see me playing on your board?
- What are your expectations and commitments?
- What is unique about your organization? What do you feel is unique about your board?
- Are there particular discussions this board has difficulty handling?
- What weaknesses are there in the way the board works together and with staff?
- What are the major issues this board is facing?
- How are you addressing them now?
- If I were to join this board, what would you want me to do during my first year?
- If I were to join this board, what could I reasonably expect to get out of the experience?

At the end of the get-acquainted meeting, you might want to suggest that each side think about it the candidate’s joining the board. Say that you’ll get in touch with the candidate within a week once you’ve had a chance to talk over the “fit” with others on the board. Encourage the candidate to think it over, call you with any questions, and let you know within a week if he or she wants to commit to being on the board.

About Blue Avocado

*Blue Avocado* is a new online magazine for people in community nonprofits. With a subscription base of 50,000, Blue Avocado has ultra-practical articles and tools along with practical, thought-provoking, and fun articles. Jan Masaoka, Editor-in-Chief. Subscribe free at [www.blueavocado.org](http://www.blueavocado.org).