

Millennials & Nonprofit Boards: 10 Tips for Finding Each Other

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As a young professional, I'll admit that "Join a Nonprofit Board of Directors" was never on my list of career goals. Likewise, "Recruit a Board Member Just Out of College" isn't high on the strategic plan of most nonprofits. But now, I'm a 29-year old with 6 years of board experience across as many different organizations (that's me in the bottom left at a recent board meeting of [SustainUS](#)). And I've realized how valuable board service can be for a Millennial, and how valuable Millennials can be to nonprofit boards.



For Millennials, a generation that already shows a strong interest in volunteering and public service, board work can be a great way to give back to your community or country, will give you direct experience in financial and personnel management and organizational strategy, and can expose you to senior contacts at a variety of other companies and organizations, since your fellow board

members will likely be [much further in their careers](#) than you. For boards, we Millennials are tech-savvy, extremely passionate, as a generation, about issues nonprofits work on, and part of the very group who will be the next nonprofit leaders and recipients of nonprofit services. Here's how to form a winning match:

For Millennials

1. **Look at what you're already a part of** – If you're a member of a chapter-based organization at school, a professional/scientific society, or even national charity, contact the organization and ask what the process is for being considered for the board. In many cases, board nominations and elections are outlined in the organization's newsletter. Don't be afraid to nominate yourself!
2. **Look locally** – Your church, local homeless or animal shelter, library or other community organization probably has a board – walk in and ask them how the board works and how someone could join. Considering volunteering there first so people can get to know you and trust you. Be upfront about your interest in board service.
3. **Ask your friends** – Many in our generation are starting their own organizations or know people who are. They might be in need of board members and will understand better than most how important a Millennial board member can be.
4. **Sign up to be matched with a board** – You already have a Facebook, LinkedIn, and maybe even an online dating profile. Services like [Board Member Connect](#) and [boardnetUSA](#) let you fill out a quick profile and then help to match you with boards that might be interested in your skills.
5. **Update your LinkedIn profile** – I was recruited to the board of [Green21](#) because the director found me through LinkedIn. Fill out the [Volunteer Experience & Causes section](#). List your interest in board service in your Summary.

For Boards

1. **Maximize your Millennial-finding channels** – Use the same resources I mentioned above that we're using to find you. Ask your program staff, some of whom are probably Millennials, to recommend people in their networks. Ask your kids. Join [LinkedIn Board Member Connect](#) to find professionals who are interested in serving on a Board.
2. **Get your meetings Millennial ready** – If you're still communicating by conference calls and paper documents, you need a tech upgrade if you're going to attract and retain talented Millennials. Start using videoconferencing for your board and committee calls. Consider giving all of your directors email addresses – an email with your organization's name after the @ is a status symbol for Millennials trying to define their professional selves.
3. **Don't treat us as tokens** – We're on your board to serve, not fill a quota. Like recruiting any director, you need to ask yourself what skills your Millennial candidates are bringing to your board (see second paragraph) and which of us will serve you best.
4. **Bring us on in pairs** – If your board doesn't have any Millennials now, and *especially* if your average director is aged 50 or above, have more than one of us on your board at once. We'll feel more comfortable, and you'll get a better sense of the range of skills we can offer for when the *next* recruitment cycle starts. Another of my boards, [Student Pugwash USA](#), has spots for two Student Board Members specified in its bylaws. That's how I first joined. Many professional and scientific societies use the same strategy.
5. **Don't underestimate our skills** – Many of us have started our own nonprofits, worked in startups, or otherwise been exposed to skills a nonprofit director needs, at a much younger age than in past generations. Don't be afraid to make us committee chairs, officers, or let us lead projects.

So whether you're an eager young Millennial, or a seasoned board looking for new talent and energy, give these tips a try. You might just find your perfect match.