

# Board Management Tips & Tricks

*A Community Curated Guide*



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## Methodology

StreamLink Software conducted a nationwide survey to collect advice on recruiting for, developing and managing boards.

The survey consisted of six short-answer questions. Responses were solicited through the StreamLink Software website, email and social media, and collected via HubSpot in February 2015. Responses are attributed when permission was provided.

## Introduction

Boards make critical, strategic decisions on behalf of the organizations they serve. In turn, maintaining a strong pipeline of board members—and keeping active board members fully engaged and invested—is essential to organizational success.

Board management has many facets, including recruitment, development and engagement. For answers, we turned to you. Here are your best board tips and tricks.



# Board Recruitment and Retention

A good board starts with putting the right talent in place. In fact, member retention becomes much easier once the right people are in your boardroom. Finding all-star board members isn't easy. Here are strategies that have proven effective:

Clearly define the role. Be honest about board member expectations, time commitments and contributions.  
— Abbie von Schlegell, a. von schlegell & co



Recruit the doers. Identify board candidates who are engaged in the community or are involved with your organization in a smaller capacity, such as a committee or task force member.  
— Kathie Roberts, The Community Foundation of Sarasota County

Get out in the community. Face time matters. "Nothing replaces getting into the community and developing connections." — Mark Collins, Cascadia Community College Foundation



Identify necessary skills. Develop a leadership and skills matrix before you begin to recruit.  
— John Siebert, Siebert Consulting



# Board Recruitment and Retention

Utilize current board members. Encourage active board members to seek out prospective recruits. "People like to serve on boards with others they like and respect." — Kelly Medwick, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation



Commit to your board. Help your board members pursue their personal and professional interests. How? "Have a strong, thoughtful and dedicated board development committee." — Liz Ortenburger, Girl Scouts of Southern Nevada



Utilize self-assessment. Challenge the board to identify its own strengths and weaknesses based on the organization's long-term strategic plan. Recruit new members to fill critical gaps, and train directors to utilize board talent wisely. — Terry Geib, Calgary Cooperative Association Ltd.





# Board Member Engagement

Keeping board members engaged is one of the most important aspects of board management. In our [2014 survey of board members](#), we found that communication, input and influence, talent utilization and overall impact all play a role in keeping board members engaged. But how to keep a board engaged is another question altogether. Here's what you had to say.

## Set Expectations

Clearly defined expectations create a kind of contract between board members and the organization. They set the foundation for a healthy partnership, and create a benchmark for future performance conversations.

Sheila Lettsome of The Center for Community Solutions said, "Communicate clearly what expectations are. Don't shy away from asking for help in certain areas. Board members bring diverse skills and want inclusion."

Here's how to establish board member expectations:

- ▶ **Determine what should be required of all board members.** Then clearly communicate expectations in recruitment, member reviews and board meetings. — Anonymous
- ▶ **Connect individual expectations to organizational goals.** If members understand what's expected of them, as well as the board's purpose, goals and functions, individuals can better visualize a roadmap for success. — Anonymous
- ▶ **Create a board member personal involvement plan, or board member commitment agreement.** This allows each board member to create and develop specific personal goals aligned with their interests, passions and the organization's goals. This plan can be used to manage performance, share the impact of their work and recognize their service. — Anonymous
- ▶ **Set the bar high.** Give board members challenging, meaningful work. Board leadership should be managing an annual calendar of activities, and not just "serving in a rubber-stamp capacity." — Mark Collins, Cascadia Community College Foundation



## What is your best advice for keeping board members engaged long term?

"Making sure you recruit passionate people and let them know what the expectations are up-front regarding time commitment, fundraising expectations and attendance at events and attendance requirements for the Board." — Cathy Ferguson, Girl Scouts of Central CA South



# Board Member Engagement

## Encourage Participation

Active participation is another commonly cited piece of advice. Tom Sadowski, Boys and Girls Club of the Capital City, asserted, “Board meetings that are active and designed to involve [board members] are essential.”

Other ideas to encourage participation include:

- ▶ **Find ways to connect** what your organization does to board members’ personal and professional interests. Help members find what excites them.
- ▶ **Encourage interaction with core business units.** If the board understands the underlying business and is confident in the key management, they will be more invested in organizational success.
- ▶ **Let them see the mission at work.** Inspire board members by making as direct a connection to your constituents as possible. Meet and greets, projects that involve them in service delivery, and similar hands-on experiences can renew a board’s passion.

## Facilitate Communication

Frequent communication and organizational transparency are key to ensuring board members feel they are part of a team.



“Often a president is challenged with board members wanting to micro-manage. I introduced the concept of bowls of M&M’s at each board meeting. When a board member starts going down the micro-management path, other board members will reach in and grab an M&M (for micro-management) and pass it to the member—reminding all board members of their role and responsibility in lieu of that of the president’s role (operations). It is a fun yet very practical way to keep a board focused on its role as policy makers.” — Sharon Hart, Northern Marianas College



# Board Member Engagement

Maintain a steady flow of information, and be available to board members for questions and support:

- ▶ **Sit down face-to-face.** Meet with each board member early and often to create open dialog.
- ▶ **Champion true transparency.** Make organizational information and data as open and accessible as possible.
- ▶ **Change starts at the top.** Encourage the executive director or CEO to develop strong relationships with board members.
- ▶ **Create feedback loops.** Evaluate performance and spot weaknesses sooner with performance reviews. Solicit feedback from members on board and individual performance. Benchmark membership satisfaction to keep pulse of board engagement.



“Provide board members with straightforward, factual information in a concise format on a regular basis. Allow board members to ask questions, challenge assumptions and provide feedback. Give credit where credit is due, and be sure to understand what board members want and need to know.”  
— Terry Geib, Calgary Cooperative Association, Ltd.

Respondents also encourage communication between board members. Offer an ongoing method of communication between members, and make sure board members have an opportunity to get to know one another.

## Tap into Talent

Board members bring diverse professional backgrounds, skills, personal interests and personalities to the table. Are you fully utilizing the talent at your disposal?

Ninety-three percent of board members who feel their skills/talents are being used effectively by the organization describe themselves as engaged or very engaged; a mere 49% report engagement when they feel underutilized.

— The 2014 Board Engagement Report, StreamLink Software



# Board Member Engagement

How to tap into the skills and passion on your board:

- ▶ **Identify roles.** Make sure all members have a purpose and function on your board, are involved in committee work, and have a role that taps into their particular expertise. — Carrie Newbern, Kiawah Island Community Association
- ▶ **Make board meetings inclusive and engaging.** Spark compelling dialog with broad questions like, “How do we move from a service organization that provides assistance for the poor to an impact agency the helps individuals overcome poverty?” — John Siebert, Siebert Consulting
- ▶ **Show appreciation.** Be sure each board member is needed and knows it. — Carrie Newbern, Kiawah Island Community Association
- ▶ **Ask members to re-commit.** Draft a “strong and complete annual board commitment statement, which each member signs—and then review it with each regularly.” — Abbie von Schlegell, a. von schlegell & co



## What is your best advice for keeping board members engaged long term?

“Be the place they enjoy the most. Listen to how they want to be involved and serve the mission, and match them with opportunities that will move your organization forward. Plug them into your model for growth and success.” — Kelly Medwick, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation



# Board Member Engagement

## Take Time to Reflect

Taking time to reflect on the mission and achievements refocuses board members on their purpose, and can renew a board's vision and passion. Provide time during board meetings for strategic, "big picture" discussions. These conversations keep all parties engaged and on mission, and reaffirm board members' reasons for joining the board.



"We begin every board meeting with a mission moment—a brief presentation on a recent impact of a program or initiative of the Foundation. We have also added a one-minute look back in history at our key donors and their philanthropy. This educates the current board on the leaders of the past and how important they were to our current work." — Kathie Roberts, The Community Foundation of Sarasota County

It's also important to celebrate successes. Offer an opportunity to pause and thank people for their hard work.

"[Remember] that your board members are individuals who have limited time to give to your organization. It is best to be respectful of their time and efforts. Ensure board meetings are efficient and do not get bogged down with time wasting activities. Ensure your board members are kept informed and engaged. When you bring on new board members, provide an orientation so they have a good understanding of their role and the organization's expectations." — Janet Schmidt, ServeNebraska





# Board Communication and Management

Open communication is an important part of keeping board members engaged. Frequent and accessible communication keeps them updated on the organization's activities, maintains their connection to other board members, and increases accountability.

## Create Consistently

Many respondents cited a commitment to consistency of communication and information transparency as key to an active and well-informed board.

- ▶ Annual reports.
- ▶ Board portals.
- ▶ Calls and in-person meetings.
- ▶ Email blasts.
- ▶ Monthly e-newsletters.
- ▶ Quarterly newsletters.
- ▶ Social media.
- ▶ Video conferencing.
- ▶ Websites.





# Board Communication and Management

Establish processes so board members know when to expect information and what to do with it.

Suggestions that were offered:

- ▶ **Make communications count.** Focus board meeting agendas on results and needed decisions. Hold regular meeting schedules for committees that have strategic work to complete. — Anonymous
- ▶ **Send materials in advance.** “Letting them know that I understand they are busy and, as such, they will receive a board packet one week in advance of the meeting. They are expected to review, call me and ask any questions prior to the board meeting and be ready to discuss the action items listed on the agenda. This save lots of time.” — Cathy Ferguson, Girl Scouts of Central California South
- ▶ **Allocate resources to board communication.** Dedicate staff to support the board chair and produce her communication content. — Anonymous
- ▶ **Solicit feedback.** At least annually, ask board members which processes are effective and which are not. — Anonymous
- ▶ **Utilize technology.** Maintain board members’ attention and engagement by centralizing information. Leverage technology to streamline board communications and increase efficiency. — Anonymous

Ninety percent of board members were engaged or very engaged when archived meeting minutes, organizational data and other resources are accessible to board members, logically organized and easy to use. This number drops to 68% when they are not.

— The 2014 Board Engagement Report, StreamLink Software



# How to Successfully Adopt a Board Portal

More and more organizations are adding a board portal to their technology stack. Why? They centralize all board information—board packets, communications, board and committee meetings, files and more. This makes it easier for board members to find what they need and stay connected to the organization, reducing administrative time in the process.

If your organization is interested in a board portal, users offer their advice in this section.

## Set Yourself Up for Success

Headache-free adoption begins with advanced preparation and planning:

- ▶ **Articulate how your organization would benefit.** Develop a proposal as to why a board portal will help the organization; include cost savings, advantages, etc.
- ▶ **Conduct due diligence.** Research possible solutions, demo several products and talk to the vendors.
- ▶ **Choose wisely.** Pick a solution that is easy to use—for you and for your board.

## Commit to Training

Training is essential to a board portal's long-term adoption. Users offer tips on successful training:

- ▶ **Get yourself trained first.** The internal product admin should become comfortable with the software before rolling it out.
- ▶ **Know your board members.** How tech-savvy is your board? Tailor the training to their comfort level.



Be patient. The setup may seem tedious, but once the initial setup is complete—all members are entered correctly and meetings are entered for the calendar year—it becomes much easier to maintain.

— Alli Fennell, Make-A-Wish Utah



# How to Successfully Adopt a Board Portal

## Simplify the Rollout Process

Once training is complete, follow these steps for a smooth rollout internally:

- ▶ **Plan ahead.** Give yourself enough time to set up the system and document a rollout plan with clear timelines.
- ▶ **Adopt a phased rollout.** During the transition, provide hard copies in addition to posting files online. This helps board members get used to the new processes at their own pace.
- ▶ **Team up.** Ask board members to help one another.
- ▶ **Reinforce the habit.** In emails or messages, link to content on the portal to encourage frequent visits.

## Board Portal Management

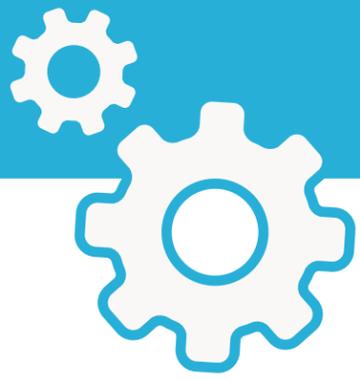
For ongoing board portal management, consider these best practices:

- ▶ **Be consistent in managing documents and meetings.** Centralize all materials online so users get in the habit of logging into the site. Handle communications and files the same every time so users know what to expect, where to look and can find what they need. — Kelly Zack-Decker, Hartwick College
- ▶ **Provide adequate support.** One organization found success by dedicating staff to manage the portal and adhering to 24-hour response time to support requests.
- ▶ **Fully commit to the software.** The less you have to use reference resources outside of the portal, the better adoption will be.



### How has your organization improved its board communication and management?

“BoardMax has helped efficiently share information for meetings without having to mail out hard copies of files. We've reworked our bi-annual statistics and have worked hard to create a collaborative atmosphere at meetings by inviting more editors to attend and present.” — Christina Nelson, JBJS

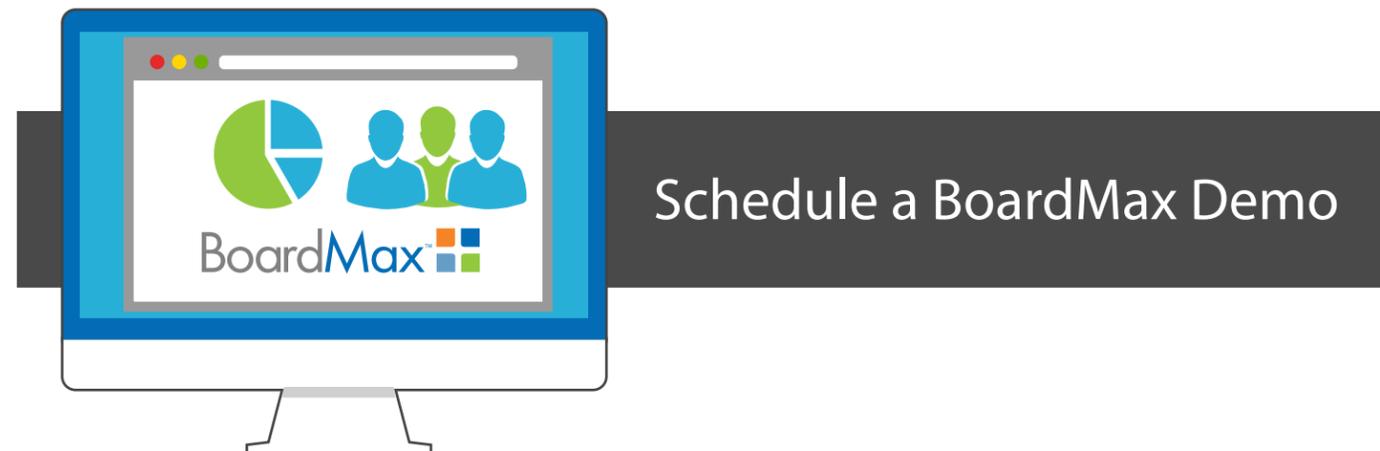


# How to Successfully Adopt a Board Portal

## Learn More About How a Board Portal Can Help You

The StreamLink Software board management portal, [BoardMax](#), helps non-profit and public sector organizations improve communication, information sharing and member management, while driving compliance and good governance.

To learn more about how BoardMax can help your board centralize communication, increase efficiency and enhance compliance, schedule a demo today.



## About BoardMax

BoardMax provides a centralized environment for all board-related information. That means meeting materials and information, organizational documentation, task assignments, and member records are logically organized and available 24/7 to board, committee and staff members.

BoardMax has built-in tools that help ensure your organization is compliant with IRS requirements, accreditation bodies, fiscal audits and board expectations.



# About StreamLink Software

Founded in 2008, [StreamLink Software](#) designs, develops and markets leading-edge process management tools for nonprofit and public sector institutions.

The company's flagship grant management solution, [AmpliFund](#), automates hundreds of complex activities throughout the grant lifecycle, thus freeing up valuable resources to pursue additional funding. Its board management portal, [BoardMax](#), helps organizations engage and communicate with board members.

Both products are high-value, affordable software solutions, designed to help nonprofit and public sector entities maintain compliance, generate revenue and build capacity.

Connect with StreamLink Software:

