

# SERVING ON NON-PROFIT BOARDS



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Drucker has noted that the non-profit sector fills both the community's need for the social service and the individual's need to contribute to society. This unique combination affords us the opportunity to support the work of organizations that are making a difference for our community's quality of life, while also growing leadership skills that are applicable in all areas of our personal and professional development.

According to a study by **Booz Allen Hamilton**, there are more than 1.2 million "vacancies" on non-profit organizations' boards of directors in any given year in the United States. That's right — 1.2 million. An average of 1.8 million board seats are available annually, and 600,000 people step forward to fill those board seats — meeting one-third of the need. Most of these vacancies occur at smaller and medium-sized non-profit organizations that desperately need strong board governance and support to survive — let alone thrive — and meet their specific mission of service to the community.

Many companies and organizations have done an excellent job of encouraging their employees to be involved in the community through board service; in fact, in the most progressive of these organizations it is considered a critical career development strategy and is recognized for the strategic value that it returns to the company. In our community, **Deloitte & Touche** and **GE Power Systems** have both been recognized for their efforts in this area.

What can be done to close the board vacancy gap?

For those who hold senior leadership and mentorship positions in for-profit

corporations, it's a smart business strategy to encourage employees — at all levels — to be a member of a non-profit corporation's board. Board membership brings new relationships, generates ideas through a changing perspective and hones leadership skills outside of the workplace. Posting non-profit board openings in the company newsletter and other internal publications promotes awareness of opportunities and sends a message that board service is valued. Recognition of those who are serving the community through board service reinforces the message; note the involvement of your employees in internal and external publications. If your company is involved in volunteering for projects at a non-profit organization, sponsorship of events or activities and/or makes charitable contributions to non profit organizations, talk to the organization's staff and volunteers about your interest in board service for your employees and find out what opportunities are available where you are already providing support. It's a natural extension of the existing relationship between your organizations.

Anyone can contribute to the enhancement of our community through service on a non-profit board. Everyone has something to offer. With the encouragement of our employers, colleagues and families, and with non-profit organizations seeking a broad cross-section of individuals to serve on their boards, we can move toward closing the board vacancy gap. Closing this gap will strengthen the mission output of non-profits, continue to build a strong sense of community, enhance skills and improve quality of life — worthy goals for any organization. **BtoB**