

Board Building: Inviting People with a Shared Vision

Recruit for skills, compatibility, and engagement

Is your board recruitment process feeling like it could use a shot in the arm? If so, now is a good time to take stock of how you bring in and support new people and create a board that will really make your land trust shine.

Identifying and Finding the Talent You Need

A land trust often starts out with a board comprised of a small cadre of passionate people who roll up their sleeves and do everything from stuffing envelopes to mending fences. As the land trust evolves to reflect new conservation and organizational needs, the board's tasks and expectations change as well.

The first step in developing a strong board is to create a board development or governance committee that includes board members, the executive director (if you have one) and sometimes other advisors. As one of its primary responsibilities, the committee works with the board to clarify the goals and expectations for board members, while also managing the recruitment process that includes a calendar and roles and responsibilities.

As part of this process, the board assesses the variety of skills, talents, knowledge and personalities needed to fulfill the land trust's goals while



▲ Conservation Trust for North Carolina board members/Rusty Painter, photographer.

We had just been recruiting randomly, year after year. We needed new energy and a strategy to proactively build a base of potential trustees. What a difference it has made!

– Bob Anderson, Centre County Farmland Trust (PA)



▲ Outdoor hike. Photo courtesy of Napa Valley Land Trust (CA).

representing the community it serves. Identifying the right people means finding the right match between what tasks the board needs to do and what skills, personalities and talents are needed on the board. In other words, before you start recruiting, develop an ideal board model and then assess the current composition of the board. Identify highest priority needs (gaps) and start generating names.

The Centre County Farmland Trust in Pennsylvania has been very successful by sending an annual letter to all members listing jobs that need to be done. Based on responses, the board creates task forces to identify new leaders. “We are more successful in bringing on new board members, which has made our board more dynamic and effective. With only a part-time executive director, an active board is critical,” says Governance Committee member Bob Anderson.

Tips for Finding Board Members

- Reach out to community leaders with non-traditional backgrounds such as entrepreneurs, up-and-coming leaders and those unfamiliar with land trusts.
- Look to your committees, task groups or volunteers for potential board members. These committees can be used strategically to grow your ranks and provide a new group of younger, enthusiastic, future board members.

- Talk to members and donors—individuals who have demonstrated an interest in the organization through ongoing involvement and financial support.
- Tap into community organizations, people and places. Think about important community civic organizations. Do people in your community attend Earth Day events, environmental film festivals or agricultural fairs? What professional groups are active in your community?
- Make a list of activities and organizations, and network through them to recruit board and committee members. Don’t overlook Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter to promote your land trust to new constituencies. Your presence on the Internet is essential to recruiting younger individuals, and is an easy and cost-effective way to develop a volunteer pool that can be used to fill committee and board seats.

Taking the Long View

Board recruitment doesn’t happen overnight—building the right board may take months or even years. And it doesn’t end. Recruitment needs to be an ongoing process, not something left until right before terms expire. Everyone in the organization, including staff (if you have staff), should be involved in identifying potential board members and submitting

nominations throughout the year.

Board Chair Rita Hayen credits Gathering Waters’ (WI) success in recruiting new board members to how the organization invests in its board, including a thorough orientation process, training and check-ins. “We make sure prospective board members understand our vision, how we pursue it and how they can contribute. There’s no magic recipe. We look at our gaps and brainstorm how we can fill them. Our board members then become our ambassadors because they find the service so rewarding,” Hayen notes.

The reward for this investment of time and resources in recruiting a board with a variety of skills and talents will be a strong board that reflects your community and works actively and passionately together to achieve your land trust’s success.

Take It to the Next Level

Questions on building your board? Sara will be online at <http://tlc.lta.org/ask-an-expert> from July 8-19. Check out her blog on board recruitment and get your questions answered. Don’t miss this special online event.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Photos (clockwise from left): The Conservation Foundation (IL) board and staff at one of the group’s wetland restoration projects in Naperville, IL. Ranchland Trust of Kansas 2010 board members celebrating their first conservation easement for the young land trust/Mike Beam, photographer. Land Trust of North Alabama’s 2011 Plein Air Art Invitational Grand Patron Party & Auction— Board member Sheryl Thomason (L) and Executive Director Cynthia Potts / Cathie M. Mayne, photographer.



ASK around

Already have a well-thought out board recruitment program? An effective board is only as strong as its talent, ongoing learning and participation. Consider these ideas to keep your new board members engaged.

The Crested Butte Land Trust (CO), an accredited land trust, combines training and fun activities to build a strong, engaged board. During their orientation, all new board members receive a board manual with an overview reiterating expectations and describing all the land trust's programs, and they have a discussion of how the board works with the executive director. After that

board members look forward to quarterly educational sessions during board meetings.

Most importantly, the leadership team doesn't ever forget that being on a board should also be enjoyable. Executive Director Ann Johnston says, "Our board is a very dedicated group of people doing important work, but we don't lose sight of the fun element in our interactions. For example, this year before our three new board members attended their first meeting, we had a dinner party for the entire board. It's a great team-building time. We always want to let our board members know we appreciate the time, talent and treasure they share with our land trust."



L-R: New board member Charla Brown, former board president Fred Holbrook, and board secretary Karen Janssen. Photo courtesy of the Crested Butte Land Trust.



IN THE FIELD: The Conservation Foundation (IL)

NAPERVILLE, IL "You have to be looking into the future. You can't build the best board for your land trust if you recruit at the last minute." President and CEO Brook McDonald of The Conservation Foundation notes that board recruitment is very much like donor cultivation: leaders have to steward relationships to attract the right people at the right time.

"Our board development committee uses the annual board evaluation process to look to the future of our land trust and to identify talent we need," says McDonald. "With the desired

talents in mind we engage our board, staff and community network in generating names. We create a 'wish list' of potential board members—individuals we know well and who are already involved in our work and those we don't know but would like to recruit. Over time we actively build a relationship with those we don't know, so they get to know the Foundation and we get to know them, assessing if they would bring the attributes we seek to the board." The board continually reviews and updates its "wish list" as the land trust's needs evolve.

