

Building a Better Board

Numbers

Have enough people on your board so that all the jobs are getting done and no one person is shouldering too big a load.

- President
- Vice President
- Treasurer
- Recording Secretary
- Membership coordinator – receives phone calls and mail, send out materials
- Someone to update and maintain the membership database
- Someone to compile the newsletter

If you have seven board members to do the above jobs, these others can be done by committees formed from the seven. Other jobs include:

- Publicity/public speaking
- Funeral home price survey
- Planning annual meeting
- Fundraising
- Funeral board/Legislative monitor
- Distribution of pamphlets (good job if you have someone on your board who is not doing much but doesn't want to leave the board. Or, use volunteers from your membership).

Skills

Look for board members who will complement your current board, not replicate the strengths you already have. Do you have these people?

- A good writer
- A good public speaker
- Someone familiar with publicity
- A couple of people with a solid financial background
- Someone with fundraising experience and/or the ability to tap into high-dollar donors
- An attorney (especially helpful are those familiar with end-of life issues or estate planning. Also nice to have for helping with 501 (c)(3) status, charities registration, etc.)
- A hospice social worker (everyone on hospice will be planning and purchasing a funeral)
- A hospice nurse or chaplain
- A physician (especially helpful; gerontologist, hospice or palliative care, ER, and/or one who sits on the local hospital's ethics committee)
- A reporter (not only a good writer but can help enormously with publicity)
- A professor who teach Death & Dying, Ethics, Marketing, etc.

Qualities

Raise your standards and you'll raise the quality of your board. Look for people who:

- Have the ability to: listen, analyze, think clearly and creatively, work well with people.
- Are willing to: review agenda and supporting materials prior to board meetings; attend board meetings, serve on committees and offer to take on special assignments, ask questions, take responsibility and follow through on assignments, contribute personal and financial resources in a generous way according to circumstances, inform others about the organization.
- Will develop certain skills, such as to: solicit funds, identify and recruit board members, read and understand financial statements, learn about and stay up to date on funeral issues.
- Possess: honesty, tolerance of differing views, a friendly, responsive, and patient approach, community-building skills, concern for your FCA, a sense of humor.

Have a couple of well known and respected community members on your board. They have good connections, are effective at spreading the word about what you do, and they will lend credibility. But, make sure they are willing to do a job as well, even if it's only a small one. Be clear with new recruits that you have a working board; there are no figurehead positions.

Even if you are thoroughly revamping your board, keep one or two long term board members if you can. While some founding members can be being rigid and controlling, others are invaluable for their institutional knowledge and expertise.

How to find them

Before you start recruiting, remember to:

- Make room for new ideas and approaches. New recruits who hear “we’ve always done it this way” will give up, leaving you back where you started.
- Show new recruits your enthusiasm. You want them to see the best of what FCA activism can do, not a doom-and-gloom plea to save a sinking ship. If you’re discouraged, fake it.

Sometimes affiliate board members feel so desperate that they will take any warm body that offers to be on the board. If you treat it like a task no one would want, you’re not going to attract the kind of people that are not going to make an effective board. Work on your mindset; remind yourself of FCA’s mission and your local’s potential, and move forward with the thought that it’s an honor to be invited to serve on your board.

If you truly think your board is crummy and you’re embarrassed to ask anyone you respect to join, you can say "I even feel guilty asking someone like you to join a board that's as weak and confused as this one. But this organization has a unique role to play as no one else is working to protect funeral consumer’s rights. What's really needed is a total overhaul of the board. I'd like you to work with me and two others of the same mind to work with the new director to recruit six new members and really make this board work. Would you work with me on that committee?"

- Post "Great Board Member Wanted" ad on free websites that match people seeking boards to join with nonprofits seeking board members.
 - See if your local community has a website

- Use the online forum at FCA's site - www.funerals.org
 - www.boardnetusa.org
 - www.volunteermatch.org
- Place ads on bulletin boards, in your newsletter, in the neighborhood newspaper, in the alumni newsletter of a local college, etc. Example: "HELP FCA YOUR TOWN... We're looking for a few talented and conscientious volunteer board members to lead and strengthen our work protecting grieving families from funeral fraud and overspending. If you can contribute your time, thoughtfulness, and leadership one evening a month and are interested in exploring this opportunity, please call *my name* at 888-888-8888 or email us at *myname@someaddress.com* to find out whether this volunteer opportunity is right for you. We're especially looking for folks with experience with *this* and *that*."
 - Form a recruiting task force. Sit with your board and make a list of 20 well-connected people of the type you would love to have on your board but who you figure wouldn't do it (but who might know someone who would). Call them and invite them to come to a single meeting. Tell them that you will be telling them about FCA, your mission, services and potential, what you're looking for in board members and that at the end they'll be asked simply for the name of one person they think would be a good board member. At the meeting, prepare a short presentation of what FCA does and end with the funniest and/or most touching story you can come up with (ask FCA for one if you don't have one) that will convey your enthusiasm. If you're lucky, one of them might actually end up agreeing to be on the board (we are very unique). At minimum, you will walk away with the names of a bunch of potential board members. The next day call each one and start by telling them who nominated them.
 - Swinging board members. Pick a few local non-profit organizations, preferably of a similar size (hospice, senior center, community hospital, counseling center, YM/WCA, medical condition related, or even a theater, music or other arts group, or environmental group). Call and invite a leader to coffee with a couple of your board members and suggest that your two organizations recommend "retiring" board members to each other as a way of establishing organizational links and strengthening ties among communities.

How to ask

Most people who have served on a nonprofit board know what they are doing and why they want to do it. However, you may have your eye on someone with no board experience. This is what you want to impart:

- Your skills are needed.
- Our affiliate is going to improve and will benefit from your contributions.
- You have the potential to effect change and have an impact.
- You will feel good by doing good.
- You will enjoy collaborating with interesting people who have the same values.
- You want to learn new skills.
- You enjoy being recognized for your efforts.
- You want to give back to the community.
- It is fun!