



OUR STAFF EXPERTS CONDUCT “SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS” INTO YOUR QUESTIONS.

Q: We are getting young people on our board and, while we appreciate their talents and energy, we are uncomfortable with their different way of doing things. What can we do to effectively involve these new board members and encourage better communication?

A: You have made an important step toward ensuring your organization’s future. There are many advantages in adding younger members to your board – increased diversity, fresh ideas, new skills, potential new leadership, future monetary support – but this move is not without its challenges. Getting a board, representing multiple generations and various perspectives, to work toward common goals will take focus, energy and creativity.

Here are some things to consider:

- Recognize differences in work habits, values and learning styles – People born during the Depression value security and respond to a hierarchical management style; those following, the Baby Boomers, have a sense of optimism and endless youth and are identified with a consensus-building style; and board members born in the 1960s – 1980s are self-reliant and action-oriented. Those born even later embrace all technologies and are wired for collaboration and working in groups.
- Don’t succumb to stereotypes – A younger person’s lack of experience should not be mistaken for a lack of intelligence. And you also shouldn’t assume that an older person doesn’t have an aptitude for technology.
- Be aware of different communication styles – Older generations were taught to respect authority, to speak when spoken to, to wait their turn. Younger generations question authority and speak

their mind. With flexibility and careful tending, your board can work with these different characteristics.

Here’s a to-do list to get you started:

- Have a comprehensive orientation program; include clear roles and responsibilities, and how your board operates, especially its decision-making process.
- Establish a mentoring system. Assign a seasoned board member to a new member, regardless of age.
- Build relationships. Plan activities for board members to get to know each other. A yearly retreat is not only good for planning but for developing relationships.
- Build an inclusive board. Ensure that no one monopolizes discussions and that all are contributing to board decisions.

For more information on generational differences, take a look at Peter Brinckerhoff’s new book: ***Generations: The Challenge of a Lifetime for Your Nonprofit.***

You may want to add minors to your board, especially if that is the population you serve. A few states prohibit minors from serving on nonprofit boards. (Maryland is not one of these states.) BoardSource (www.boardsource.org) offers these suggestions if you do decide to invite a minor to serve as a board member:

- Provide adequate orientation or assign a board mentor.
- Avoid electing minors as officers in charge of financial matters.
- When the law prohibits it, don’t allow minors to sign binding contracts for the organization. (The Maryland Code is silent on this issue.)
- Provide D&O insurance for the entire board, but be aware that standard, off-the-shelf policies may exclude minors. (The Maryland Nonprofits D&O policy does not exclude minors.)