

# The Board Cultivation Cycle

A practical guide to building high-performing boards

Most nonprofits recruit board members reactively — someone knows someone, there is a vacancy, and suddenly you have a new member who may or may not be the right fit. The Board Cultivation Cycle is the intentional alternative.

Developed by BoardSource, the leading authority on nonprofit governance, this framework organizes board building into nine stages across three phases. The goal: high-performing boards built through design, not default.

## PHASE 1 - STRATEGIC RECRUITMENT

<b>1</b> IDENTIFY	Assess your current board before recruiting anyone. Conduct a skills and diversity matrix. Look at what is missing: expertise, demographics, community connections, or lived experience.	<b>Key question</b> What does this board need to govern well over the next three to five years?
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### Tool: Board Matrix Worksheet

Use the [Board Nominating Matrix](#) alongside this step to map your current board composition and surface gaps. The matrix tracks six dimensions across current and prospective members: areas of expertise, resources, community connections, personal style, age, and race/ethnicity. It gives the Identify stage structure — turning a conversation about who you need into a visual picture of what you have and what is missing.

<b>2</b> Cultivate	This is the step most organizations skip. Before making an ask, build a relationship. Invite prospects to an event, a site visit, or a program. Let them fall in love with the mission before you ask them to govern it.	<b>Key question</b> How do we help this person connect with our work before we ask for a commitment?
<b>3</b> Recruit	When you make the ask, be specific and honest. Share what board service actually involves — time, financial expectation, responsibilities. Candidates who say yes to a real picture become far more effective members.	<b>Key question</b> Have we told this person the full truth about what we are asking of them?

## PHASE 2 - EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

<b>4</b> Orient	New board members need a real orientation, not a packet and a handshake. Cover the mission, programs, governance basics, financials, current priorities, and the culture of how this board works.	<b>Key question</b> How do we help this person connect with our work before we ask for a commitment?
<b>5</b> Involve	Place members in committees and roles that match their strengths. Early, meaningful involvement builds ownership and engagement. Passive board members are usually under-assigned ones.	<b>Key question</b> Are we giving each member a role that actually uses what they bring?
<b>6</b> Educate	Board service should grow and evolve. Ongoing learning — retreats, governance training, peer exchange — keeps members engaged and effective over time. Invest in your board the way you invest in staff.	<b>Key question</b> Are we helping board members become better governors, not just better volunteers?

### PHASE 3 - INTENTIONAL REVITALIZATION

<p><b>7</b> Evaluate</p>	<p>Effective boards assess themselves regularly – board performance, committee effectiveness, individual engagement. Evaluation creates accountability and opens the door to honest conversation.</p>	<p><b>Key question</b> Are we willing to look honestly at how well we are governing?</p>
<p><b>8</b> Rotate</p>	<p>Manage terms with intention. When members cycle off, make it a thoughtful transition – not a disappearance. Term limits create space for new energy without losing institutional knowledge.</p>	<p><b>Key question</b> Are we treating board transitions as opportunities, not losses?</p>
<p><b>9</b> Celebrate</p>	<p>Recognize outgoing members meaningfully. Alumni who feel valued become donors, advocates, and ambassadors. Celebration is not just courtesy – it is board development strategy.</p>	<p><b>Key question</b> How are we honoring what departing members gave to this organization?</p>

Organizations with intentional board cultivation practices report stronger engagement, better fundraising participation, and less governance dysfunction. The cycle takes discipline, but it replaces perpetual scrambling with something sustainable.

#### **Want to build a board cultivation system for your organization?**

Book a free 30-minute discovery call at [www.spiegelconsulting.com](http://www.spiegelconsulting.com) – or reach Noah directly at [noah@spiegelconsulting.com](mailto:noah@spiegelconsulting.com) or 615-997-0944.