

Things to do before joining a Board:

- Read the organization's by-laws and board and committee minutes for at least the last year to learn about its purposes, activities and concerns.
- Obtain a current list of board and committee members
- Find out what is expected of board members
- Have a conversation to learn about what the board does
- You may want to understand why any board members left the board
- Review the organization's audited financial statements for at least the last two years as well as its current internal financial reports to gain an understanding as to how the organization uses its assets and to evaluate its financial health.

Some questions to ask:

- Is its auditor's report on its financial statements unqualified?
- Has the auditor sent the organization a management letter identifying issues of concern?
- Has the Internal Revenue Service recently audited the organization?
- Obtain an understanding of the internal control structure of the organization and the processes in place to monitor it.

Understand the organization's:

- Mission
- learn about its various programs
- read its newsletters and website
- Be sure to understand the organizational chart and the accountability structure of the organization. Find out about the employee evaluation and compensation processes and due diligence procedures for entering into material contracts.
- Understand the conflict of interest policy members are not paid by the organization and neither they nor their family members have any financial relationship with the organization other than ownership
- Review the package provided to by new directors as they join the Board specifically what needs to be signed.
- Find out how the organization addresses actual or potential conflicts.
- Find out what committees the board has established and decide which (if any) you might wish to join
- Understand what materials to be considered by the board or its committees are distributed in advance of meetings. Find out how the meetings are structured: by consent agenda or other means.
- Obtain the current year's budget and cash flow projections. Find out how they compare to actual income and expenses and what processes are in place to monitor these comparisons.
- Find out whether the insurance coverage appears to be appropriate, including Directors' and Officers' liability and employee fidelity insurance. The latter is particularly important - it is surprising how often embezzlement is discovered.
- Most important, make sure you are able to devote the time expected of a board member. Understand any responsibilities and expectations of board members. Joining a board without sufficient time to devote to its business is often at the root of troubles faced by boards. A decision to decline an invitation to join a board because you don't have the time to devote to the board should be respected.
- Learn what training (if any) is provided to board members.