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# Factors in the Selection of Board Members to 501(c)(3) Human Service Organizations

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**FACTORS IN THE SELECTION OF BOARD MEMBERS  
TO 501(c)(3) HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

A THESIS SUBMITTED

by

Robert G. Campbell

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

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The University of San Francisco

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FACTORS IN THE SELECTION OF BOARD MEMBERS  
TO 501(c)(3) HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to identify the processes actually used by nonprofit organizations in the selection of board members. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 subjects representing 10 human service nonprofit organizations. The data were analyzed in relation to various research questions. Case studies were written which describe the process of board member selection used by each of the organizations. Elements of these selection processes were formulated into a model of the actual processes applied in board member selection. The actual model was then compared to the prescribed model of selection formulated as a result of information encountered in a review of the literature. Results of this study provide a rare glimpse into the actual board member selection processes applied by nonprofit organizations. One outstanding finding was that nonprofit organizations are not necessarily following the model of board member selection prescribed in the literature. This study indicates that the selection of new board members provides the opportunity for nonprofit organizations to increase their effectiveness. Although filling vacant seats on a board may be difficult, subjects reported that it is more important to find the right board member than to fill a vacant seat. By selecting new board members who possess the expertise and characteristics sought the board enhances its ability to advance the mission of the organization successfully into the future.

## **Vita Auctoris**

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**This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents, the late Thelma Elizabeth Elliott and Robert Raymond Campbell and to my precious daughter, Lena Elizabeth Pine-Campbell.**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background

Nonprofit organizations represent an important economic sector in the United States. In 1988, the Internal Revenue Service's master file had one million active nonprofit organizations. These organizations employed nearly eight million people and had expenditures totaling more than \$280 billion. The bulk of these activities and assets represent approximately four hundred thousand 501(c)(3) charitable organizations providing human services in the areas of health, mental health, and education throughout the United States (Hodgkinson, 1990). The nonprofit sector has been rapidly expanding with the number of 501(c)(3)'s increasing by 5.5 percent between 1989 and 1990 (Wood, 1992). According to the California attorney general's office, there were fifty thousand 501(c)(3) charitable organizations registered in California in 1988 with a combined income of \$20 billion and assets totaling \$40 billion (Silk, 1992). There are between 500 and 700 501(c)(3) organizations formed each month in California (Nonprofit Times, April, 1989). A conservative estimate would place the number of people living in California serving as members on a nonprofit board of directors at over 250,000. In Santa Cruz, a small rural county in central California with a population of 225,000, there are three hundred and ninety eight 501(c)(3) human service organizations of which 32 had expenses of over

\$250,000 in 1991.

Every nonprofit organization is required by law to have a board of directors; most operate with a minimum of three members. The policies regarding the specific number of members, terms of office and selection process are usually found in the organization's bylaws. Board members of nonprofit organizations are usually unpaid, part-time volunteers who are none the less responsible -- legally, financially, and morally -- for these organizations (Wood, 1992). Board and board member responsibilities are fundamentally the same for all nonprofit organizations. The ways in which boards and board members actually fulfill their responsibilities vary greatly (Ingram, 1988).

The performance of the board of directors of nonprofit organizations is of concern to executive directors, funding sources, the community within which the organization functions, the clientele served by the organization, and individual board members themselves. Thanks to a growing emphasis on nonprofit management, an increasing number of nonprofit organizations are well managed. However, many board members believe themselves and their organizations to be a good deal less well managed than the average business (Drucker, 1990). In response to the concerns for improving board performance, there have appeared a number of books and articles offering self-help guidance for boards (O'Connell, 1985; Mathiasen, 1986; Conrad, 1986; Ingram, 1988; Herman, 1989; Houle, 1989; Drucker, 1990; Holland, 1991). Much of

the existing literature on the roles and responsibilities of boards is prescriptive; in addition, it often draws on personal experience and anecdotal evidence (Bradshaw, 1992).

Each board member possesses the potential to impact the performance of the board, the organization, and ultimately the community and clientele it serves. The prescriptive literature discusses how to do everything from creating board resolutions and accomplishing self-assessments, to the cultivation, recruitment, selection, and orientation of new board members. Tools are available for the creation of bylaws, board member job descriptions, step-by-step procedures for the establishment of nominating committees, and lists of preferred board member characteristics.

The selection of board members to nonprofit human service organizations is important. The literature on this subject addresses concerns about board structure and effectiveness, the role and needs of executive directors relative to the board, and the requisite characteristics of new members, suggesting an integral connection between organizational success and board member selection. A prescriptive model for board member selection has emerged from this literature.

This study will identify this prescriptive model for selecting board members and then describe the actual processes applied by 10 nonprofit human service organizations in Santa Cruz County, California, for the selection of their most recently named board member.

### Statement of the Problem

The quality of the governing board is an important ingredient in the success of a nonprofit organization. The board's quality, in turn, often directly reflects both the strength of the nominating committee members and the plan the committee develops to select and engage each new board member from the time of recruitment until retirement (Nelson, 1992). The prescriptive literature proposes a model for board member selection yet research on the topic is rare.

Results of interviews with 37 individuals who have nonprofit expertise suggested a number of important research questions related to the effectiveness of boards. One such question was how do boards actually behave, as opposed to how models and bylaws say they should (Brown, 1986). This study answers that question in the area of board member selection.

Locating volunteers who are willing to take on the legal and financial responsibilities of a director in a nonprofit organization is both time-consuming and difficult. Much of the prescriptive literature on board development suggests having board terms of no more than three years, with mandatory "retirement" at the end of each term (Houle, 1989; Conrad, 1986). Many boards allow election of individual board members to a second term while some organizations allow an unlimited succession of terms. Regardless of these differences, however, filling board

vacancies is a regular part of organizational life for almost all nonprofit organizations.

Though the literature suggests that nonprofit organizations are successful, in part, due to the quality of the governing board and prescribes a model to recruit board members who will be effective, no studies on the actual selection process used by nonprofit human service organizations could be found. Before addressing the issue of a successful board of directors it is important to know how the selection process actually happens.

This project, therefore, will describe the actual processes of selecting new board members to 10 nonprofit human service organizations that had expenses of \$250,000 or more, in Santa Cruz County, California.

### **Research Questions**

1. Is it difficult for nonprofit organizations to find qualified board members?
2. How are the strengths and weaknesses of a prospective board member ascertained?
3. Does a relationship exist between a nonprofit organization's stage of development and the qualities it seeks in new members to its board of directors?
4. Do nonprofit boards identify the selection of new

members as an opportunity to improve organizational effectiveness?

5. What is the process used to identify prospective board members?
6. What is the role of the executive director in the selection process?
7. What common elements can be identified in the actual processes used to select new board members among the 10 nonprofit human service organizations studied in Santa Cruz County?
8. How do the actual board member selection processes of the 10 organizations in the sample compare with the prescribed model for board member selection presented in the literature?

### **Definitions**

**Nonprofit human service organizations:** Organizations that primarily provide direct benefits and services for individuals and families, such as hospital care; outpatient services; home health care; rehabilitation; elementary, secondary, post-secondary, and continuing education; family services; foster care; food subsidies; subsidized housing; crime victim support; and job training.

**Board member:** A person serving as a director on the board of a nonprofit human service organization in a voluntary capacity.

**Prospective board member:** A candidate identified by a nonprofit organization, with the potential to meet the requisite qualifications to be considered for election to a seat on the organization's board of directors.

**Governance structure:** The operating procedures and protocols by which the activities of the board of directors of a nonprofit organization take place.

**Nominating committee:** A committee designated by the board of directors of a nonprofit organization for the purpose of identifying prospective board members. Such a committee is often charged with the responsibility to establish the criteria by which prospective board members will be evaluated.

**Self-perpetuating board:** A board of directors of a nonprofit organization that elects its own members.

**Membership organization:** A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in which the board of directors is elected by the membership of the organization.

**Stage of development:** An organizational behavior concept that identifies various life cycles of an organization, typically founding, growth, maturity, and decline. Generally, the stages imply various management decision making processes in the development of strategic goals.

### **Significance of the Study**

The nonprofit sector has become identified as the "third sector" and an important part of the economy of the United States, along with business and government (O'Neill, 1989). Nonprofit practitioners and researchers have made observations over the past decade about board performance and structure and have regarded these as integral to organizational effectiveness and accountability.

This study provides a description of the actual selection process of board members, based on interviews with the nominating committee chair (or alternate), the newest board member, and the executive director of 10 nonprofit human service organizations. An in-depth understanding of the board member selection processes of these 10 organizations will provide important insights for other nonprofit boards as they prepare for the selection of new board members. A comparison of actual selection processes with that prescribed in the literature is also offered. The information gathered for this study will help to prepare nonprofit boards to maximize the effectiveness of their member selection process.

### Limitations

Generalization is limited because data are collected from only ten 501(c)(3) human service organizations, with expenses of \$250,000 or more, in Santa Cruz County, California. Because of the limited amount of time and financing available, only 30 subjects were interviewed. Due to the relatively small size of the sample this study is potentially biased and, therefore, limited in its ability to provide suggestions about the typical board member selection process.

The research undertaken is qualitative rather than quantitative. It suggests emergent elements in actual board member selection processes used by the 10 nonprofit organizations studied, and also provides a comparison to the model prescribed in the literature, rather than presenting precise descriptive statements about the board member selection processes used by nonprofit organizations. Although interviews with the 30 subjects were guided by an interview protocol in an effort to gain empirical information, the personal nature of the observations and measurements made by the researcher present significant limitations in replicating the research findings. Therefore reliability is limited.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

The literature regarding board member selection is, for the most part, prescriptive. It ranges from very specific suggestions for the recruitment process (Nelson, 1992), to vague generalizations noting board member selection as an important strategy affecting organizational effectiveness (Axelrod, 1990). Throughout the literature member selection is linked to organizational effectiveness. Consequently the literature reviewed for this study discusses the issue of board member selection from two general perspectives: board member qualifications and governance structure. These perspectives were chosen because they capture the elements recommended in the model for board member selection prescribed in the literature.

The literature reviewed regarding board member qualifications is divided into two parts: board member characteristics, and board effectiveness and self-evaluation. The literature regarding governance structure reviews the role of board members, the executive director, and the nominating committee.

### **Board Member Qualifications**

#### **Board member characteristics.**

One question this research project answers relates to the difficulty nonprofit organizations have in finding qualified board members. In those organizations studied the

boards were comprised of volunteers taking on the legal, financial, and moral responsibilities of nonprofit human service organizations.

Volunteerism is a tradition in American life. Volunteers offer many skills, insights, and hours of helpfulness. Volunteers get the job done without compensation. For the most part, board members of nonprofit organizations are volunteers. Though most nonprofit human service organizations are formed to provide services to individuals, governing boards do not volunteer to help individuals obtain services. Board members of nonprofit organizations volunteer to own the business--often in trust for some larger ownership, i.e. founders, the community, and the clientele. Board members are responsible and liable for the legal and financial obligations of the organization. Therefore, members of the board of directors of nonprofit organizations are expressing an "ownership interest" rather than a "helpfulness interest" (Carver, 1990). Because of the level of legal responsibility for the organization that board members assume, selecting volunteer board members is different than selecting volunteers to run a food bank.

In his book, Boards That Make A Difference, Carver lists the following five qualifications for board membership:

1. Commitment to the ownership and to the specific mission

2. Propensity to think in terms of systems and context
3. Ability and eagerness to deal with values, vision, and the long term
4. Ability to participate assertively in deliberation
5. Willingness to delegate, to allow others to make decisions

Houle (1990) states that some of the basic traits board members should possess include commitment to the organizational mission, a respected position in the community, and an ability to influence public opinion among significant sectors of the community. A diversity in background among board members is also important. The board members should have some spread in age, and both genders should be represented. The location of residence should be considered because the cost in time and money of widespread geographical representation is high. In addition, important elements in the constituency and clientele of the organization should be examined. Since organizations need board members with specialized expertise, they may look for someone knowledgeable in personnel policy, financial management, investment, legal matters, or political contacts. Chait (1989), however, points out that there are no guarantees that the traits possessed by the individual at the time of recruitment will carry into the activities undertaken by the board. According to Chait, astute business

executives often forget sound management principles when they become trustees of nonprofit organizations.

In a study of executive directors, Fletcher identified 10 criteria of a "good board" from the point of view of the executive. These concur with similar findings by Houle that good boards choose new members with regard to specific skills or connections the new member can offer (Fletcher, 1992). Contrary to this view of board member traits is another that suggests boards give greater priority to a recruit's interest in the organization's work than to his or her demographic characteristics, occupation, or connections to a community's elite (Herman, 1985). Herman also suggests that potential members who desire to learn or improve skills related to board performance should be seriously considered.

The model generally prescribed in the literature suggests that a profile of desired characteristics of prospective board members be compiled (Houle, 1989). Such a profile should be used to evaluate the new recruit's qualifications prior to recommendation to the board.

There is evidence that board member characteristics change as organizations pass through various growth cycles (Wood, 1992). Therefore, traits desired in new board members will change as organizations move through developmental stages. Wood identifies three recurring stages that follow the founding of boards: super-managing boards, corporate boards, and ratifying boards. These cyclic changes in board management style influence the operating structure, role,

and behavior of boards as well as the characteristics of board members. Founding board members tend to be strongly, even morally, committed to solving the social problems that are the agency's mission. "Super-managing" board members are personally interested in promoting a business-like approach to board affairs but are also committed to the mission. In the "corporate" phase, board members tend to exhibit the attitudes and values of middle-aged-professionals. That is to say, goals, bureaucratic structure and process are emphasized more than mission. "Ratifying" board members are more interested in associating with other prestigious board members in support of a good cause. Wood's cyclical model offers board members, executive directors, and others a potentially useful insight into board behavior.

If the cyclical model seems applicable in understanding a particular board's behavior (i.e. its members' interests and motivations at a particular point in the life of the organization), the same approach should also be used to identify some of the characteristics desired in new board members; because as an organization changes, so do its board members. Characteristics sought in prospective board members for a start up organization may change as the organization becomes more mature.

#### **Board effectiveness and self-evaluation.**

One way boards can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of prospective board members is by evaluating the

strengths and weaknesses of the board as a whole. The model of board member selection generally prescribed in the literature recommends a systematic process for assessing strengths and weaknesses of the current board composition. The cyclical model described by Wood suggests such a process would need to be applied often enough to reflect the current stage of the organizational cycle.

The literature on board-of-directors effectiveness is growing, and characteristics of effective boards are being identified (Knauff, 1991). One suggestion for strengthening boards is to base member recruitment on considerations of function and diversity (Vittitow, 1992). According to Bradshaw (1992), having board members who share a common vision is important, as is having the executive director be the primary source of that vision. This view supports the work of Herman (1989), who concludes that the leadership quality of a nonprofit executive director is the single most important factor in organizational effectiveness. However, prescriptions like those summarized by Herman suggest that the board, in tandem with the executive, is of comparable importance in determining the performance of the organization it governs. The universality of these prescriptions in predicting actual board performance is increasingly being tested empirically (Bradshaw, 1992).

Boards are responsible for evaluating organizational activities. Evaluation is generally a planning function that assists the board in deciding where it wants the

organization to go. Self-assessment by board members identifies where the board is. Measurable standards are key to a successful evaluations. (Michaels, 1989). Such evaluation, applied to board member selection, can guide the board in deciding what levels of expertise are needed or desired. Accurate evaluation of the board, by the board, is critical, especially when considering the range of knowledge, experience, skills, and other characteristics needed in new members. Through such evaluations nonprofit boards can select new members strategically, with the goal of making the organization as effective as possible (Axelrod, 1990).

In their efforts to improve board performance, trustees need to examine current organizational functioning; identify specific areas requiring further development; and monitor the impacts of any interventions (Holland, 1991). To accomplish this, boards need to have clear standards of performance and trustworthy assessment methods. Applying such standards and assessment methods to the strategic selection of new board members would have a positive impact on the organization's effectiveness.

The literature suggests that board members should be concerned with their effectiveness. Holland (1991) concludes that boards have little ability and fewer tools with which to perform self-evaluation that might reveal how effective they are. The literature recommends that the board of directors conduct self-evaluations to assess current

strengths and weaknesses of the board prior to determining the qualifications they will seek in new board members.

### **Governance Structure**

#### **Roles of board members, executive directors, and nominating committees.**

Governance structure is one of the most significant factors for effective selection of board members. The literature recommends that a process for board member selection be identified in organizational bylaws, nominating committee procedures, and other written procedures enacted by the whole board. The research conducted for this study describes actual processes used by nonprofit organizations in the selection of board members and compares these processes with the prescriptive model in the literature.

The success of a nonprofit organization depends, in large part, on the quality of the governing board (Nelson, 1992). Significant factors of board quality identified by executive directors in a study by Fletcher (1992), included having a board committee that screens prospective members and having a formal orientation for new board members. As mentioned by Ingram (1988), the selection of board members is as important a function of governance as determination of organizational mission, selection of the executive director, review of executive performance, and effective management of resources. Herman outlines eight prescriptive standards widely accepted as necessary to bring quality to governance activities. Three of these standards deal directly with

board member selection: assessment of board member strengths and weaknesses; creation of a board profile; and recruitment of new board members whose attributes address weaknesses identified by the board profile (Herman, 1989).

The executive director is the principal connection between the board and the staff. The executive's role relative to board membership should be to help the board maintain an effective nominating committee and to provide a thorough orientation for new board members (Axelrod, 1990). Executive directors of nonprofit agencies with top-scoring boards, as identified from a study of 200 executives in the San Francisco Bay Area, indicated that they: (1) took an active role in the board recruitment process only in conjunction with a board membership committee; (2) are active in the orientation process of new members; and (3) believed board success was dependent, in part, on a careful recruitment and selection process of new board members (Fletcher, 1992). This research project will describe the role of the executive director in the board member selection process of those organizations studied.

The establishment of a nominating committee, (sometimes called the membership committee), is the recommended approach to board recruitment. The board should define the nominating committee's responsibility in the bylaws, a board resolution, or under the guidance of a precept or other authoritative written direction. Committee responsibilities include criteria for selecting potential board members,

cultivating their interest in the nonprofit, presenting them to the board for approval, orienting new members to their responsibilities, and involving them in the life and work of the board (Nelson, 1992).

In a 1985 study on an incentive approach to board participation, Widmer posed several questions regarding the desirability of board participation to 98 individuals representing 10 human service agencies in New York state. Board members participating in Widmer's study were asked to identify the first organizational representative who spoke to them about potential board membership. Forty-three percent responded that the first contact was from a friend on the board, 17 percent by staff or the executive director, and 6 percent by their employer or supervisor at their job (Widmer, 1985).

The prescribed model recommends that each board member take responsibility for cultivating new board members and that the board as a whole approve the recommendation of the nominating committee.

In the process of recruitment an interview with the prospective board member is often suggested. The recruitment team should candidly spell out duties and responsibilities of board membership (Broce, 1986). Some prospective board members are required to attend board meetings prior to assuming membership. Others are chosen from a pool of persons already familiar with board operations (Carver, 1990).

It is generally accepted that the nominating committee is one of the most important board committees (O'Connell, 1985). Trusting recruitment to a nominating committee of the board can be useful, but integrity is maintained only if the board as a body has decided what type of people it desires. The board should phrase its committee charge so that finding the right people is given greater priority than filling vacancies (Carver, 1990).

### **The Prescribed Model of Board Member Selection**

The literature review concludes with a listing of various elements of the board member selection processes suggested by several authors including Herman (1985), Conrad (1986), Mathiasen (1986), Ingram (1988), Houle (1989), Axelrod (1990), and Nelson (1992). The list of these elements are organized into a logical order and the resultant process is identified by the researcher as the prescribed model of board member selection.

The prescriptive model is comprised of the following elements:

#### **Qualifications.**

1. The board has and uses a systematic process for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the current board members. Strengths and weaknesses are usually assessed regarding demographic characteristics, expertise and skills, resulting in a board profile.
2. The profile is used to identify the personal characteristics and expertise and skills desired in new recruits to the board. Diversity is recommended.

3. The prospective board member gets a well-thought-out interview or meeting with two board members (or with one member and the executive director), during which the candidate's motivation and qualifications for joining the board are assessed relative to the board profile.

#### **Governance structure.**

4. The board has a committee charged with recruiting new board members. The committee is usually called the nominating committee or the membership committee.
5. The charge of the nominating committee is a matter of written record, either in the by-laws, board resolution, or other authoritative written direction. This record includes the role of the executive director in the recruitment, selection, and orientation processes.
6. Each board member takes responsibility for cultivating prospective members by making recommendations to the nominating committee.
7. Potential members are thoroughly informed about the mission and goals of the organization, its financial condition, and the time, effort, and level of financial contribution expected of them.
8. Potential board members are recommended by the nominating committee to the full board for approval.

#### **Summary.**

Board member selection is a very specific governance activity of nonprofit boards. The literature on board member selection tends to focus on more general concerns for board governance such as board effectiveness and organizational success. The literature on board member selection can be organized into two general categories: board member characteristics, and governance structure. The result of the literature review provides a prescription for how board members should be selected. Throughout the

literature it is suggested that the success of a nonprofit organization depends in part on the board, and that the effectiveness of the board results from careful selection of each board member (Nelson, 1992). No literature was found that describes how board members are actually selected by nonprofit human service organizations. The literature review concludes with a synthesized model of board member selection. This prescribed model is used for comparison with research results illustrating how board members are actually selected in ten 501(c)(3) human service organizations in Santa Cruz County, California.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The executive director, chair of the nominating committee (or alternate), and the newest board member from ten 501(c)(3) public charity human service organizations in Santa Cruz County were interviewed to obtain a description of the process used to select their newest board member. The data from the interviews were used to answer the research questions and to develop case studies for each organization's process. Common elements that emerged from the case studies are organized into a logical order and the resultant process is identified as the actual model of board member selection. The actual model is compared with the model for board member selection prescribed in the literature.

### **Subjects**

Ten 501(c)(3) human service organizations in Santa Cruz County, California with expenditures of \$250,000 or more in 1991 were randomly selected for the study from a pool of organizations that provide a range of services including: family planning, legal assistance for seniors, shelter for homeless individuals, and after-school day-care for children. Interviews with the executive director, the nominating committee chair (or alternate), and the newest board member were conducted for each organization.

Four nominating committee chairs were interviewed for this study. When no nominating committee chair was available the executive director designated an alternate interviewee. The alternates selected included three board presidents, two board secretaries, and one board treasurer.

### **Research Design**

Semi-structured interviews with the executive director, nominating committee chair (or alternate), and the newest board member from each of 10 randomly selected human services organizations were used to obtain qualitative data. A total of 30 one-hour interviews were completed. Each interview was guided by an interview protocol. The questions were open-ended. The interviews were recorded and notes were taken.

The data resulting from the interviews provides information to answer the research questions, identify common elements, identify a model of the actual board member selection process used by the 10 organizations, and provide a brief case study for each organization relative to its specific board member selection process.

This ethnography provides descriptive information on how board members are actually selected. These descriptions were compared with the prescriptive model of board member selection that emerged from review of the literature.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument for the study was the interview protocol (Appendices B, C, and D). The protocol was developed to elicit each subject's experience of his/her organization's most recent board member selection process. The interview method was most appropriate for gathering descriptive information. Open-ended questions elicited information which may not have emerged from a completely structured interview or a mailed survey questionnaire.

Personal background and agency demographic information was obtained in the interview to provide a more detailed profile of individuals and organizations participating in the study.

### **Procedures**

A random sample of 10 agencies was drawn from a population of thirty two 501(c)(3) public charity, charitable purpose human services organizations with expenses of \$250,000 or more in 1991 in Santa Cruz County. The sampling frame was obtained from the California Nonprofit Database at the University of San Francisco's Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management. The model for board member selection suggested by the literature reflects processes that large educational and human service organizations tend to follow. The sampling frame for this study was selected because it includes agencies large enough to make use of the board member selection process suggested

by the literature. The type of agencies included within the sampling frame are schools, food banks, skilled nursing facilities, family planning centers, rehabilitation and job training centers for the disabled, housing programs for the mentally ill, youth homes, drug treatment centers, and senior services agencies.

The 32 organizations in the sampling frame were listed in alphabetical order and numbered 1 through 32. All 32 organizations were selected using a random sample table. Some of those contacted declined. Eighteen organizations were contacted before the 10 required for the study agreed to participate.

Interviews of 30 minutes to one hour were conducted with the executive director, nominating committee chair (or alternate), and the newest board member of each organization. There were four nominating committee chairs. Executive directors of organizations without nominating committee chairs board officers as alternates. Thirty interviews were completed with 10 executive directors, 10 nominating committee chairs or board officers, and 10 new board members.

The interview protocol was used to guide the interview and answer the research question, "How are board members selected for 501(c)(3) human service organizations?" Each interview was taped and notes were taken. Common elements were identified among the actual processes used by the 10 organizations in their most recent board member selections.

The result is a description of how board members are selected in these 10 nonprofit human service organizations.

### **Treatment of the Data**

The research questions guided analysis of the tapes. The data, in the form of the answers given during the interviews, made possible the identification of common elements among the organizations regarding their executive directors, nominating committee members (or alternates), and new board members perception of the most recent selection process. The personal background and agency information collected during the interviews provides additional detail describing the 10 organizations collectively.

Each organization was assigned a letter "A" through "J." The taped interviews were the basis for 10 written case studies covering the 10 organizations. The case studies describe the actual board member selection process of each organization. Elements of the board member selection process common to each of the organizations in the study are identified as the actual model. How board members are actually selected is answered by the identification of the actual model.

The actual process of board member selection described by participants in the study is compared with the prescribed model drawn from the literature. Differences between the model described in the literature and actual practices

revealed in this study are considered. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations for future research are suggested.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

This chapter reports the results of interviews with executive directors, nominating committee chairs (or alternates), and the newest board members in each of the 10 nonprofit human services organizations studied. The findings of these interviews are divided into three sections.

**Section A** responds to research questions one through six and contains an analysis of 20 interviews: 10 with the executive directors and 10 with the nominating committee chairs, (or alternates) of the 10 organizations participating in this study.

**Section B** contains the case studies found in Appendix E, lettered A through J. The case studies are the results of 30 interviews with the executive directors, nominating chairs (or alternates), and new board members from each of the 10 organizations studied. Table 6 presents general patterns of the actual procedures that emerged from the interviews about the selection processes used by the 10 organizations studied.

**Section C** reports on the prescriptive model of board member selection identified as a result of the literature review. These are presented graphically in Table 7. The findings regarding actual board member selection processes, presented in Table 6, are compared with the prescriptive model presented in Table 7, and conclusions are drawn.

The information contained in this chapter is intended to identify procedures actually applied in the selection of new board members to 501(c)(3) nonprofit human service organizations.

### **Data Collection**

Ten 501(c)(3) human service organizations with expenditures of \$250,000 or more located in Santa Cruz County were randomly selected for this study from a sample group of 32 similar organizations. After the random selection, the organizations were relisted 1 through 32 in the order they were drawn. The executive directors of 18 organizations were contacted before 10 agreed to participate. Eight organizations declined to participate citing time restraints.

Thirty interviews were conducted with three respondents from each of the 10 organizations. Interviews were taped and transcribed. Case studies were written and research questions were answered based on the results of those interviews. The data collected were used to identify actual board member selection processes and to compare these to the prescribed model that emerged from the literature review.

### **Participant Characteristics**

The 10 organizations participating in this study were selected randomly. Two of the 10 organizations studied were membership organizations in which board members are elected

by the membership of the organization rather than by the board. One of these organizations followed a procedure by which the board itself could appoint up to three individuals to board seats. In such instances, the individual appointed to a seat would have to be elected by the membership at the next election in order to continue as a board member. Eight organizations had self-perpetuating boards.

Ten executive directors were interviewed as were 10 new board members. Six of the 10 new board members had served in their organizations five months or less prior to being interviewed for this study. The median length of board service among the new board members interviewed was four months in their respective organizations. The length of time these members had served on these boards ranged from one month to five years. The individual with five years of service was counted as a new board member because he was returning to an organization after a mandatory time-out between consecutive board terms.

Four organizations had nominating committee chairs. Executive directors of the six organizations without nominating committee chairs chose board offers as alternates to be interviewed for this study. Three of the six officers chosen were board presidents. The four nominating committee chairs, three board presidents, and the three other board officers were interviewed, each representing one of the 10 organizations selected for this study. New board members and

executive directors from each of the 10 organizations studied were also interviewed for a total of 30 interviews.

The researcher kept the names of the organizations confidential to encourage candid responses by the subjects. More information regarding the characteristics of the individual subjects and participant organizations is listed in Table 1 and Table 2.

**TABLE 1: Characteristics of Participating Board Members**

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>			
<u>All participating board members</u>	30	100			
<u>Age</u>					
20-39	4	13			
40-59	21	70			
60 +	5	17			
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
Pacific Islander	1	3			
Latino	2	7			
Native American	2	7			
Caucasian	25	83			
<u>Gender</u>					
Female	19	63			
Male	11	27			
<u>Relationship to organization</u>					
Executive director or founder	2	7			
Executive director	8	27			
Nominating committee chair	4	13			
Board president	3	10			
Other board officer	3	10			
New board member	10	33			
<u>Years with current organization</u>					
<u>Service years</u>	<u>Exec. Board dir.</u>	<u>Board member</u>	<u>New Board member</u>		
0-2	1	2	9	12	40
3-5	1	3	1	5	17
6-8	1	3	0	4	13
9-11	5	0	0	5	17
12-14	2	2	0	4	13
<u>Years of board member experience with any nonprofit organization</u>					
<u>Service years</u>	<u>Exec. Board dir.</u>	<u>Board member</u>	<u>New Board member</u>		
0-4	5	1	4	10	33
5-9	1	2	1	4	14
10-14	1	2	0	3	10
15-19	0	3	0	3	10

**Source:** Responses to interview questions

**TABLE 2: Characteristics of Participating Organizations**

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<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<b><u>All participating organizations</u></b>	10	100
<b><u>Years in existence</u></b>		
1-4	0	0
5-9	1	10
10-14	4	40
15-19	5	50
<b><u>Expenses for most recent fiscal year</u></b>		
\$250,000 - \$499,999	4	40
\$500,000 - \$999,999	1	10
\$1,000,000 - \$2,999,999	4	40
\$3,000,000 - or more	1	10

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**Source:** Responses to interview questions

## **Findings**

### **Research questions**

Research questions one through six are listed and analyzed in relation to the interviews with 10 executive directors, four nominating committee chairs, three board presidents, two board secretaries, and one board treasurer who represented the 10 organizations studied. Therefore 20 interviews were conducted to answer research questions one through six.

The responses of the new board members interviewed were not applied to research questions one through six. New board members were interviewed to gain their perspective as outsiders on the selection processes used by the 10 organizations. The data collected through interviews with the new board members provided information regarding the actual selection processes used by each organization. These are described in the case studies. However, the outsiders' perspective of the new board members limited their ability to relate adequately to issues addressed by the research questions one through six, so their responses were not applied.

#### **1. Is it difficult for nonprofit organizations to find qualified board members?**

Table 3 identifies the number of board of director seats, the number of vacancies on the board prior to the

seating of the most recent board member, the number of prospects considered for the vacant seats, the number of seats actually filled, and the number of seats remaining on the board at the conclusion of the most recent selection process for each of the 10 organizations. The bylaws of two organizations allow for a variable number of board members; one from 13 to 19 members, and the other from 11 to 21. The higher number of allowable seats was the number used for compiling these research findings.

The median number of directors' seats in the 10 organizations studied was 15, within a range of nine to 21. During the most recent selection process a total of 42 seats were vacant, and 33 prospects were considered for these vacant seats. Twenty-one new board members were actually seated as a result of the most recent selection processes. After the most recent board member selection process had been completed, the median number of board seats remaining vacant was two. The number of remaining vacancies on each board ranged from a zero to nine.

Upon completion of the most recent selection, 70 percent of the organizations continued with at least one vacant seat. The length of time each board operated with at least one vacant seat ranged from one month to 11 years, with a median of 15 months. Sixty percent of the organizations have terms for board members ranging from one to four years in length with the average board term among these organizations being 2.5 years. Houle (1989) and Conrad

(1986) suggest that board terms be no longer than three years. The median board term for the 10 organizations in this study was one year. Table 4 provides information regarding each organization's board terms.

**TABLE 3: Number of Board Seats, Vacancies Before and After Selection, Prospects Considered, and Prospects Selected by Organization**

<b>Org.</b>	<b>Total board seats</b>	<b>Vacant seats before selection</b>	<b>Prospects that were considered</b>	<b>Prospects that were selected</b>	<b>Vacant seats after selection</b>
<b>A</b>	15	9	10	9	0
<b>B</b>	13	4	1	1	3
<b>C</b>	21	3	6	1	2
<b>D</b>	19	5	1	1	4
<b>E</b>	9	3	1	1	2
<b>F</b>	21	10	3	1	9
<b>G</b>	12	1	3	1	0
<b>H</b>	17	1	1	1	3
<b>I</b>	9	5	6	4	1
<b>J</b>	15	1	1	1	0

**Source:** Responses to interview questions

**TABLE 4: Length Of Board Terms in Consecutive  
Number of Years by Organization**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Number of consecutive years per term</b>
<b>A</b>	1
<b>B</b>	No Terms
<b>C</b>	No Terms
<b>D</b>	No Terms
<b>E</b>	No Terms
<b>F</b>	3
<b>G</b>	4
<b>H</b>	4
<b>I</b>	1
<b>J</b>	2

**Source:** Responses to interview questions

Seventy-five percent of the 20 individuals interviewed believed it is difficult to find qualified candidates to fill vacancies on their boards. The three most mentioned obstacles to filling board vacancies were:

- (1) finding people who have the time to give and the commitment to accomplishing the work of the board;
- (2) finding community members who possess the skills and qualifications being sought; and
- (3) the difficulty in identifying recruits who will help balance the ethnic diversity represented on the board.

Other common difficulties in filling board seats include a lack of clarity among current board members regarding the priority of characteristics sought in new board members, and recruitment of individuals when fundraising is an expectation of board service. One executive director summed up the effort to find board members by saying, "It is a constant process; we never let it go."

In conclusion, it is difficult for most nonprofit organizations to fill vacancies on their boards of directors, and vacant seats are a matter of routine. Board member selection is part of the ongoing work of boards of directors. The organizations profiled in this study place a higher priority on selecting skilled board members than on filling vacant seats. Carver (1990) suggests that any procedures identifying the role of nominating committees in

board member selection should clearly state this priority. The consensus among those interviewed in this study is that the essential characteristics desired in new board members are: a commitment to give the time required to complete board tasks; willingness to participate in fundraising; and ethnic identity that enhances the ethnic diversity of the board.

**2. How are the strengths and weaknesses of a prospective board member ascertained?**

Nine of the 10 organizations studied had some process for determining the characteristics they desired in new board members. Four of the 10 have written procedures detailing this process. Only 3 of the 10 compiled a written matrix or board profile identifying the current board's expertise and demographics as a method of specifying those characteristics sought in prospective board members.

The processes reported in the interviews ranged from such informal means as the executive director calling the board's attention to an increasing number of vacancies on the board, brainstorming with the board about what expertise they felt was needed, and suggesting an individual for recruitment, to formal procedures such as a presentation by the nominating committee chair at a board meeting, suggestion of prospects from a list of groomed individuals whose qualifications closely matched a written matrix identifying the current qualifications sought in new board

members. These processes, however intuitive or formalized, set the standard against which prospective board member's strengths or weaknesses were measured.

In her 1992 study to identify characteristics of "good boards" as defined by executive directors, Fletcher found that "good boards" choose new members with regard to specific skills they will bring to the organization. Houle (1990) and Herman (1989) also prescribe a process for the identification and evaluation of characteristics sought in prospective board members.

Two of the 10 organizations in the present study are membership organizations in which the board itself does not select board members, except in special situations. Instead, board members are selected by the membership of the organization during elections at an annual meeting. The election process is formalized in the bylaws of these organizations. Respondents from both these organizations stated that there is no "real evaluation" of prospective board members, (or in this case nominees) prior to election. However, in one of these organizations, the most recent board member was appointed by the board. In this case the individual had served four years as a board member but had to leave the board because he had served the maximum number of successive terms. After passing a mandatory period of time off the board, he was seated a second time by appointment, without an interview, by a vote of the whole board based on his good reputation and prior service.

Eight of the 10 organizations (excluding the two membership organizations) followed an interview procedure to assist in evaluating prospective board members. Half of these organizations conducted interviews through interview committees composed of a combination of nominating committee chairs, board officers, and/or executive directors. One organization had a staff member other than the executive director on the interview committee. Interviews were usually conducted after a board candidate had completed an application which stated demographic information, interest in serving, and areas of expertise. Two of the 10 organizations conducted interviews at a regular board meeting with the prospect present.

Prior to these interviews there were various internal conversations, both formal and informal, that assisted the evaluation of the prospect's strengths and weaknesses. In nine of the 10 organizations either the executive director, nominating chair, or an officer of the board had at least one contact with the prospect. During these contacts qualifications were discussed and the prospect's interest in serving was clarified. In six of the 10 organizations it was the executive director or the nominating committee chair who had the first contact with the prospect.

After the first conversation with the board as a whole and prior to formal seating of the new board member, all 20 of those interviewed rated the recruit as desirable for board membership. Eighty percent viewed the recruit as

"very desirable." For the most recent member selection nine of the 10 boards conducted a final vote which formally seated the new board member. The one organization that did not do this was the membership organization in which the most recent board member was elected by the general membership at the annual meeting. The vote by the whole board of the nine organizations was the final step in the evaluation of the new board member's strengths and weaknesses and the last approval necessary to fill vacant board seats.

Seventy percent of those interviewed believed that prospective board members are well informed about the mission, goals, and financial condition of the organization prior to being seated. However, 60 percent believed that there was a general lack of clarity on the part of the organization regarding expectation of a financial contribution from the prospect.

In conclusion, most organizations follow some process for identifying standards by which prospective board members' strengths and weaknesses will be measured, but few formalize these standards into written policy and procedures. Recruits are interviewed by board representatives and, with the exception of membership organizations, a vote by the full board is required to formally seat new board members. All of the individuals who were seated were desired by the organization in advance of the final vote by the board. Most organizations believe

their selection process provides recruits with enough information to understand the organization's mission, goals, and its financial condition. However, there is a general consensus that expectations of a financial contribution as a condition for board membership are usually not conveyed to prospective members with sufficient clarity.

The process for evaluating prospective board members' strengths and weaknesses employed by the organizations in this study resulted in the selection of new board members who strengthened the board in at least one of the areas the board had identified as needing improvement, according to interview respondents. The processes employed by the organizations studied comply with standards prescribed by Herman (1989) to bring quality to the governance activities of nonprofit boards, although on the whole they are less formalized.

3. **Does a relationship exist between the cycle of development of a nonprofit board and the qualities it seeks in new board members?**

Eighty-five percent of the 20 individuals interviewed reported that the current stage of the board's development was a consideration in the selection of the newest board member.

Table 5 provides specific information regarding the age of the organization and cumulative number of executive directors since inception for each organization studied. The

median age of an organization in the study was 14.5 years with a range from nine to 21 years. Half of the organizations were 15 years or older. Two of the 10 organizations continue with their founding executive director, while a total of four organizations have had only one executive director. The two executive directors who were not founders were hired by the founding board as the organizations' first paid executive directors. The median number of executive directors that the 10 organizations in this study have had is two, and the range is from one to nine. Sixty-five percent of the 20 individuals interviewed described their organizations as executive director dominated.

**TABLE 5: Organization's Age and Number of Executive Directors  
By Organization**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Years in Operation</b>	<b>Executive Directors</b>
<b>A</b>	14	1
<b>B</b>	11	1
<b>C</b>	16	4
<b>D</b>	21	3
<b>E</b>	9	1
<b>F</b>	15	1
<b>G</b>	10	2
<b>H</b>	20	9
<b>I</b>	16	5
<b>J</b>	13	2

**Source:** Answers to interview questions

Fifty-five percent of the 20 individuals interviewed described their organization as mission-focused while an additional 30 percent report their organizations as being balanced between commitment to the mission and commitment to business methods to optimize changes for organizational survival. One nominating committee chair whose organization operates a homeless shelter put it this way: "The board has recognized the need to operate in a more structured, businesslike manner. Our concern has been that we not forget the reason that we came together. One of the ways we remind ourselves is, at the beginning of each board meeting, to ask for some kind of a contemplation or to think about and focus on the issues of homelessness." Only 3 of the 20 individuals interviewed emphasized business considerations as a leading priority without also mentioning the importance of upholding the organization's mission.

When considering their organization's stage of development, those interviewed reported preferences for new board members with expertise in the areas of strategic planning, fund-raising, property management and acquisition, business, personnel policy, and nonprofit management.

In conclusion, when considering the selection of new board members, 85 percent of those interviewed identify their organization's stage of development as one in which the business of running the organization is balanced with a commitment to the mission. Those interviewed reported that some of the qualities desired in new board members were

directly related to their organization's current stage of development. There was general agreement among those interviewed that a strong commitment to mission is important but that a businesslike structure and approach to the activities of the board are required to move the organization successfully into the future. Boards that are identified with these characteristics are described by Wood (1992) as super-managing boards.

4. Do nonprofit boards identify the selection of new members as an opportunity to impact organizational effectiveness?

In response to the question "Is board member selection important to you," 55 percent of those interviewed said very important, while the remaining 45 percent said extremely important. All believed that member selection provided an opportunity to have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the organization. "Without new board members to continue the work of the organization," said one nominating committee chair, "to continue the fund-raising part for example, and to continue to shoulder some of the work so that the executive director and other staff can do their work, I really believe that the organization will, at some point, falter."

None of the individuals interviewed suggested any standards by which to measure the impact of new board members. However, nine of the 10 organizations (excluding

one membership organization) have an internal process to identify specific qualities sought in new board members based on the strengths and weaknesses of the current board. As a result of these processes all of the organizations reported that new board members had strengthened their boards, and they could identify the specific expertise added through the seating of the new board member.

Michaels (1989) suggests that the key to knowing if a board member selection strategy has worked successfully is being able to identify a measurable standard. Even though boards in this study identified expertise that they were seeking in new board members, they did not identify the expertise sought in new board members as a standard by which they would measure the results of their selection. However, they did report that their selection process brought desired expertise to the board.

The opportunities most frequently mentioned by those interviewed for new board members to impact organizational effectiveness were:

- Through fund-raising
- By providing input on program development
- Through working as a team with the executive director
- By providing the organization connections within the community
- Through input on financial management
- Through the establishment of organizational policy

- By providing professional skills to the organization at no cost
- Through guidance and counsel of the executive director
- By increasing the cultural competence of the organization as a whole

One executive director said new board members will have the opportunity to impact her organization through "setting the general policy, strategy, and program direction of the organization, and to ensure its financial stability."

Another executive director said, "It's really important to have board members who understand the issues, who are articulate on those issues, who can go out and publicly represent the agency in a really capable way. I think that ability has a lot to do with organizational effectiveness."

One nominating committee chair views the selection of new board members as important to the organization because "Members of the board are in an absolute critical role in terms of the agency and where it goes and what direction it takes. The whole strategic planning process was a board assignment and we spent a lot of time figuring out what we want to do and where we want to be five years from now."

In conclusion, new board members do have an opportunity to impact organizational effectiveness. Though no standards were mentioned against which to measure this impact, those interviewed reported that the new board members selected had strengthened their boards. Nine ways in which new board

members can help make their organizations more effective were identified. Implicit in the responses from those interviewed is the requirement for the selected candidate to make the transition to active board member. That is, only by using the skills for which he or she was selected will new board members have a positive impact on the organization's effectiveness. "Board members set the tone, the climate," concluded one executive director. "Their decisions affect a lot of people's lives."

5. What process is used to identify prospective board members?

Nine of the 10 organizations' boards used a process to identify their most recent board member. The one organization that did not was one of the membership organizations. (In this case the membership of the organization rather than its board of directors identified prospective board members through their nomination process.) Seven different processes were used by the 10 organizations studied. These ranged from an executive director "intuitively" selecting a person she felt would be a desirable board member to a formalized process of creating a grid which divides the community into "networks" of constituency, assessing the current board's expertise, demographics, and place in the network, and then selecting a prospect from a groomed list of recruits for the open seat. The results of these processes identify the characteristics

desired in new board members. Among nine of the 10 organizations studied, identifying desired characteristics was the first step in identifying prospective board members. The most desired characteristics among the 10 organizations studied, in order of preference, were:

- Represents the Latino community
- Willing to commit time and energy
- Financial expertise
- Interested in mission
- Willing to do fund-raising
- Legal expertise
- Nonprofit management expertise
- Representative of specific geographical areas
- Small business expertise

Of the 20 individuals interviewed, 45 percent reported that the 10 new board members had some connection to the executive director or the nominating committee chair prior to the beginning of their recruitment process. In these instances it was the executive director or nominating committee chair who identified the new board member as a prospect and was the first organizational representative to speak with him or her about any interest they might have in board service. In Widmer's study (1985) on the incentive approach to board participation, 45 percent of the board members questioned reported that they were first contacted regarding their interest in serving as a board member by a friend of theirs already on the board. In the current study,

new board members who had no connection with the organization prior to recruitment were identified as potential candidates by the board president 17 percent of the time; by staff and the executive director 12 percent of the time each; and by board members and the nominating committee chair 6 percent of the time each.

Once new board members had been identified, those interviewed reported that 70 percent of their names were given directly to the executive director, while 20 percent were given to the nominating committee chair, and the remaining 10 percent were distributed equally between the board president and board as a whole.

In conclusion in order to identify prospective board members, boards first identified characteristics desired in new board members. There is a broad range in the formality of the processes used to identify board member characteristics. Individuals who become board members are often acquainted with executive directors or nominating committee chairs prior to their recruitment. However, individuals in all areas of the organization -- from line staff through all levels of the board to the executive director -- took some part in identifying prospective board members.

6. **What is the role of the executive director in the selection process?**

The most common roles for the executive director in

board member selection were to identify potential prospects and to give feedback to the board and others regarding prospects' qualifications. Other roles executive directors played in member selection were as members of the nominating committee, as staff supporting the work of the committee, and as participants with other board representatives during the interviews.

In two of the organizations studied the executive director is a member of the board and votes along with the board to seat new members. In these two organizations the executive director was also the founder. In the two membership organizations in this study the executive director is a member and therefore casts a vote along with the general membership during annual elections of new board members.

Nine of the ten executive directors interviewed created their own role in the board member selection process and they shared at least part of their role with others. In fulfilling their role during the most recent board member recruitment, executive directors met the expectations of nominating committee chairs and board officers 100 percent of the time.

In half of the organizations studied, executive directors provide a leadership role in the process of board member selection, yet only three of the 10 executive directors are active in maintaining an effective nominating committee. Six of the 10 executive directors work in tandem

with the board or nominating committee chair. A study by Fletcher (1991) indicated that executive directors took part in board member recruitment only in conjunction with board members and the nominating committee. In the present study the role of the executive director was formalized in a written procedure in only 1 of the 10 organizations.

In conclusion, executive directors defined their own roles regarding their participation in board member selection. These roles usually include prospect identification and evaluation. Executive directors included the board and nominating committee chair in activities related to board recruitment. However, they did not provide leadership in developing an effective nominating committee.

### **Case Studies and Common Elements**

The case studies are presented in Appendix E and are labeled A through J. Each study is a description of a particular organization's most recent board member selection process. The data for the case studies were collected in taped interviews with the executive director, nominating committee chair (or alternate), and the newest board member from each of the 10 organizations.

The 30 interviews used to develop the case studies were also used to identify common elements in the actual selection process of new board members among the 10 organizations. Table 6 identifies these elements, providing the response to research question number seven. The

researcher kept the names of the organizations confidential in an effort to encourage candid responses by the subjects.

Table 6 lists the common elements of the actual board member selection processes used by the 10 organizations studied. These elements emerged from comparison of the data collected in interviews with the executive directors, nominating committee chairs (or alternates), and the new board members from each of the 10 organizations participating in the study. The elements are general patterns observed in the actual processes of board member selection applied by the 10 organizations. The organizations are represented by letters A through J. A "+" in a column signifies that the element of the actual model on the left was used by that organization in the selection of its most recent board member. A "-" in the column indicates that the element was not used.

**TABLE 6: The Actual Model of Board Member Selection**

Model Of the actual processes as observed in board member selection	Participating organizations									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
A process was used for assessing the current board's strengths and weaknesses as a way of identifying the characteristics sought in the new board member	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
A process was used to evaluate the characteristics of the new board member	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Diversity was recommended	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	+
The new board member was interviewed by representatives of the organization as part of an evaluation process	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
The board had a committee that was responsible for member recruitment	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	+
The executive director had a role in the selection process	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Executive director, nominating committee, or a board member recommended the new board member for consideration to fill the vacant board seat	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
The new board member was well informed as to organization's mission, goals, financial condition, and level of time, energy, and financial contribution expected	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+

**TABLE 6: The Actual Model of Board Member Selection**

Model of the actual processes as observed in board member selection	Participating organizations									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
New board member was recommended to the board by the executive director, nominating committee, board president, or board member	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Full board voted to seat the new board members	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

**Source:** Responses to interview questions

Table 6 shows that the majority of the elements identified through the 30 interviews were used by the 10 organizations in the selection of their most recent board member. A median of 8.5 of the elements were used by the 10 organizations. The range of elements used was from a low of five to a high of 10. Eight of the organizations studied used eight or more of the 10 elements that make up the model of board member selection identified in this study.

In conclusion, there were certain common procedures utilized by the 10 organizations that resulted in the selection of their most recent board members. Elements of the procedures described in the 30 interviews with executive directors, nominating committee chairs (or alternates), and new board members, have been combined to describe a model of actual board member selection processes utilized by the 10 organizations studied.

### **Comparison**

This section responds to research question number eight. The elements of the prescribed model of board member selection identified in the literature review are presented in Table 7 and are compared to the elements of the actual selection processes used by each of the 10 organizations studied, which are presented in Table 6. Conclusions are drawn from comparisons of the two models.

In Table 7 the organizations are represented by letters A through J. A "+" in a column signifies that the element

of the prescribed model on the left was actually used by that organization in the selection of their most recent board member. A "-" in the column indicates that the element on the left was not used in the actual selection process for that organization.

**TABLE 7: Prescribed Model of Board Member Selection**

Components of prescribed model for board member selection as stated in the literature	Participating organizations									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Systematic process use for assessing current boards strengths and weaknesses	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-
Written board profile results from the assessment of current board's strengths and weaknesses	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
Profile is used to identify skills or expertise sought in new board members	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
Diversity recommended	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	+
Prospect interviewed by at least 2 board members (or 1 plus exec.) based on profile i.d.'d expertise	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-
Board has a committee charged with recruitment	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	+
Committee charge is written	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
Executive director has a role in the selection process	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Executive's role is written	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
Board member recommended prospect to nominating committee	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
Prospects well informed as to organization's mission, goals, financial condition, and level of time, energy, and financial contribution expected	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	-
Prospect recommended to board by nominating committee	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-

**TABLE 7: Prescribed Model of Board Member Selection**

Components of prescribed model for board member selection as stated in the literature	Participating organizations									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Full board votes to seat new board members	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

**Source:** Literature review and responses to interview questions

Table 7 shows that most of the process elements recommended in the literature review for board member selection were not used by the organizations participating in this study. The elements of the model prescribed in the literature that were not used by a majority of the organizations in the actual selection of new board members are:

- A systematic process for assessing the current board's strengths and weaknesses
- A written profile
- The use of a written profile to assist in identifying the skills or expertise sought in new board members
- A written description of the charge of the nominating committee
- A written procedure describing the role of the executive director
- A process by which board members make their recommendations to the nominating committee
- A procedure by which prospects are recommend to the whole board for a vote by the nominating committee

These elements of the prescribed model are recommended in the literature by Conrad (1986), Mathiasen (1986), Herman (1989), Houle (1989), Axelrod (1990), and Nelson (1992), as formalized procedures to be written into the organizational bylaws, board resolutions, or other authoritative policies.

A median of 4.5 of the elements recommended by the prescribed model do appear in the actual board member selection processes used by each of the 10 organizations studied. The elements used ranged from three to 13. Six of the 10 organizations studied used five or fewer of the 13 elements recommended by the prescribed model.

The elements regarding the role of the executive director and the recommendation of candidates to the board for a vote identified in the prescribed model were used in nine out of the 10 organizations studied, while the recommendation for diversity was used in seven of the 10 organizations.

Comparing the actual board member selection processes (Table 6) to those recommended in the prescribed model (Table 7) demonstrates that:

- Although a process existed for assessing the current board's strengths and weaknesses, this process was not systematically applied in the actual selection of new board members.
- There was usually no reference to the use of a written profile among the 10 organizations studied.
- Though new board member characteristics were evaluated during the actual selection process there was not necessarily a written profile to guide the evaluation.

- Though there was a committee responsible for the selection of the new board member among the organizations studied, it was not necessarily a nominating committee acting according to written procedures.
- The executive directors in the 10 organizations studied did have a role in the selection of the newest board member, yet this role generally did not find its way into any written procedure.
- New board members were recommended to a variety of individuals within the organizations studied, rather than to the nominating committee exclusively.
- Among the organizations studied the new board member was recommended by the executive director, nominating committee, board president, or a board member for a vote by the whole board rather than by the nominating committee exclusively.

In conclusion, when the actual model was compared to the prescribed model from the literature review, it was found that the 10 elements that make up the actual model are contained within the 13 elements that make up the prescribed model, but 7 of the 10 elements in the actual model are not formalized as procedures written into the organizations' bylaws, board resolutions, or other authoritative policies, as is recommended in the prescribed model.

## Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion

### Review of the Problem

The nonprofit sector is an important part of the economy of the United States (O'Neill, 1989). Nonprofit human service organizations are usually governed by a volunteer board of directors. These volunteers are responsible legally, financially, and morally for the organizations they serve.

Accountability is a growing concern among executive directors, funders, the clients and communities served by nonprofit organizations, and board members themselves. Organizational effectiveness is linked to the quality of the board members and board member quality is ultimately linked to the selection of new board members (Nelson, 1992).

Out of the growing concern for board performance many books and articles have appeared (O'Connell, 1985; Conrad, 1986; Mathiasen, 1986; Herman, 1989; Houle, 1989; Carver, 1990; Drucker, 1990). Thomas Holland (1991), when writing about self-assessment by nonprofit boards, referred to this literature as offering self-help guidance, much of which is based on individual experience and opinion, and said that the information offered is exhortative rather than empirical, more anecdotal than systematic. A model of board member selection has been drawn from the literature and prescribed for use by nonprofit organizations.

One question professionals in the nonprofit sector are

asking is how do boards actually behave as opposed to how models say they should (Brown, 1986). No research could be found on how nonprofit boards actually select new board members.

In the study of board member selection among nonprofit organizations, the question of how the process actually happens was examined through interviews with individuals who were involved in their organization's most recent selection process. Ten organizations were studied. The executive director, nominating committee chair (or alternate), and the newest board member from each organization were interviewed about the process used to select the most recent board members.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The results of this research are limited but also suggestive. They provide a rare glimpse into the actual board member selection process used by nonprofit organizations. Though no studies could be found regarding board member selection a review of the literature identified common prescriptions for boards recommending various procedures and protocols to assist in selecting their membership. However, some of the authors of these prescriptions (O'Connell, 1985; Houle, 1989; and Herman, 1989) express doubt that nonprofit organizations are actually following their advice. The findings of this study provide a description of some of the factors figuring in the

actual selection of board members to 501(c)(3) nonprofit human service organizations.

One outstanding finding was that, for the most part, these nonprofit organizations selected their board members without the aid of the kind of formalized governance structures prescribed in the literature. For example, although the prescriptive model recommends written procedures and protocols, only one of the 10 organizations studied used them in selecting their most recent board member. However, common elements in board member selection processes used by each of the 10 organizations studied could be extracted from the interviews. This is interesting because, even without formalized procedures, the actual selection process used by the organizations was quite similar and it resulted in new board members bringing desired expertise to the board. This may indicate that one important factor in board member selection is that individuals responsible for the selection agree on the process they will use to accomplish the task, whether the process is stated in writing or not.

The issue of selection process evaluation is also interesting. Those interviewed said they believed that their organizations' selection process had improved the level of expertise on the board of directors. This conclusion was drawn in response to the question, "Does board member selection provide an opportunity to impact organizational effectiveness?" Interviewees described how new board members

could use their expertise, for example by participating in strategic planning or representing the organization favorably in the community, to accomplish the work of the board. These responses implied that although a candidate with a specific expertise or characteristic might be identified, they would have an impact on the organization only if, as a new board member, they applied those skills for which they had been selected. Performance of the new board member(s) would have to be evaluated to determine if and how their addition to the board had improved organizational effectiveness. The findings seem to suggest that board member selection does provide nonprofit organizations an opportunity to increase their effectiveness by bringing desired skills to the board of directors.

Research for this study revealed that board vacancies are commonplace among nonprofit organizations. Although 10 new board members were interviewed for this research, there were actually 21 selected as a result of the most recent selection processes in the 10 organizations studied; and there were actually 42 vacant seats among the 10 organizations at the beginning of the selection processes. A total of 33 prospects were considered. At the conclusion of the selection there remained a median of 2.5 vacancies on the boards of the 10 organizations studied. This is interesting because it suggests that board vacancies are an ongoing part of board life. The explanation for ongoing vacancies may be that qualified board members are not in

ample supply within the community, and that boards place a higher priority on seating quality board members than on filling vacant seats.

Another important finding was that external factors are affecting specific characteristics being sought in new board members by nonprofit organizations. For example, the study revealed that the most needed characteristic sought by the participating organizations was Latino representation. Although ethnic diversity is recommended by Conrad (1986) and Houle (1989) as an important characteristic for nonprofit boards, no specific ethnic group is identified. The appearance of specifically Latino representation as the most sought characteristic in this study is not coincidental. In Santa Cruz County where this study was conducted, all local governmental bodies (four cities and the county) are requiring boards of nonprofit agencies with whom they contract to be representative of ethnic groups in parity with the general population census; and in Santa Cruz County 74 percent of the population is white and 20 percent is Latino. All of the organizations participating in this study receive some local government funding. Therefore it appears that these external funding factors affected the identification of a specific ethnic group as the characteristic most desired in new board members.

This study found that most of the organizations were described by those interviewed as in transition from being more mission-focused to being balanced between fulfilling

the mission and operating in as business-like as a fashion possible to ensure the organization's future. These assessments suggest that most of the organizations participating in this study were moving out of a founding stage of development. This suggestion is supported by a few specific findings. For example, the median age of the organizations was 14.5 years, while the median number of executive directors was two. Also, 65 percent of those interviewed described their organizations as executive-director-dominated. These findings, coupled with the noted lack of policy and procedures relative to board member selection, suggest that executive directors have taken on a major share of the responsibility to find new board members. Indeed, the study revealed that 70 percent of the executive directors and nominating committee chairs (or alternates) interviewed reported that prospective board members' names were given to the executive directors for initial review. The executive directors usually had the first contact with the new board member. The study revealed that executive directors tended to report having created their own roles regarding the selection of new board members and that they were not involved in maintaining effective nominating committees. For the organizations participating in this study these findings strongly suggest that the executive director was the primary player in the selection of new board members.

## Conclusion

From the standpoint of executive directors, nominating committee chairs, board members, and other individuals involved in the selection of a nonprofit organization's board members, the findings of this research offer six fundamental conclusions. First, nonprofit organizations are following similar processes to select new board members. These processes result in adding needed skills to the board of directors of nonprofit organizations. Second, board members and executive directors believe that the selection of new board members provides an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of the organization because the selection process is adding to the overall level of skills of the board of directors. However, nonprofit boards of directors are not necessarily evaluating new board members' performance based on the skills for which they were sought. Third, nonprofit organizations are not necessarily following the model prescribed in the literature in filling vacancies on their boards. Failure to follow the prescribed model may result from governance structures too underdeveloped to support the activities related to board member recruitment and selection.

Fourth, it is difficult to find qualified board members. Chronic board vacancies are a normal part of life for nonprofit organizations. Nonetheless, nonprofit boards are filling vacancies primarily because of the skills possessed by prospective board members rather than because

they simply want to fill a vacant seat. Therefore, qualified board members are a much sought-after group of people by nonprofit human service organizations. Fifth, external factors figure in identifying characteristics nonprofit organizations most desire in new board members. Notable in this regard are government funding policies that are playing a significant role in promoting ethnic representation on the boards of directors of nonprofit human service organizations.

Sixth, in organizations which are executive director-dominated or that are in transition from a founding phase of development, there is a tendency for the executive director to be isolated in her or his responsibility for finding board members. In these situations executive directors are playing the major role in the selection of new board members.

### **Recommendations for Action and Future Research**

#### **Recommendations for action.**

The results of this research project can be used to assist nonprofit organizations in their pursuit of new board members. Keeping in mind that board members of nonprofit human service organizations are usually volunteers, it is important to honor voluntary board members through formal and informal recognition of their work and commitment on a regular basis.

Each nonprofit organization has its own unique way of

accomplishing its tasks. It is recommended that organizations not lose sight of this in the selection of new board members. Boards should clarify the process by which new board members are selected in their organizations, adopt this method as the organization's model of board member selection, and write it down. Once this action is taken organizations should review their method annually and update it as needed. Such review will result in greater clarity and expertise among board members in the selection of new board members.

In order to determine if an organization's board member selection process assists the ongoing work of the organization, it is recommended that specific skills and characteristics desired in new board members be identified for the selection process prior to recruitment. It is important to implement a process to assist the new board member to make the maximum use of the skills for which she or he was selected. It is recommended that the board chair inform the new board member of those skills which were most desired by the board and to routinely check with the new board member to see how the organization is making use of those skills. This will provide an opportunity for the board to assess the impact of the new board member and to let the new board member know she or he is appreciated for the work being done.

To assist nonprofit boards in finding qualified board members it is recommended that the board maintain an ongoing

list of prospective board members. The individuals appearing on such a list will need to be contacted regularly to monitor their availability and continued interest. Also, regular contacts with these individuals should be used to educate them about the roles and responsibilities of board members in nonprofit governance. Through this action the cultivation of new board members will become an ongoing part of the board's activity. This recommendation is based on the fact that board vacancies are the norm rather than the exception.

When identifying characteristics desired in new board members the standard recommendation is to assess the current strengths and weaknesses of the board. As a result of this research it is also recommended that boards consider external factors that may be relevant to determining which characteristics should be sought in new members. This action will help ensure that boards reflect the needs of both the internal and external environments within which the organization is functioning. It is very important not to overlook government funding requirements when considering characteristics of board members.

It is recommended that organizations which are in a transition period clarify the roles and responsibilities of board members, nominating committees, the executive director, and others as they relate to the selection of new board members. This transition period is a good time to determine if there is agreement about who is responsible for

what, or if certain responsibilities are to be shared by all. If adjustments in roles or responsibilities are made, it is recommended that they be written. This will assist the organization during the next review of the board member selection process and will increase the effective use of resources in selecting board members. It is further recommended that the role of executive directors, in particular, be reviewed periodically. This recommendation is made to ensure that the executive director is not isolated with the total responsibility of finding new board members. It is also made to ensure that the role of the executive director, however formal or informal regarding the selection of board members, is understood and supported by the board of directors. The result of such action might identify the need for a nominating committee structure or clarify that such a committee is not necessary.

#### **Recommendations for future research.**

As an organization moves through various stages of development, from founding through maturity to decline, how do the roles of the executive director and the board change regarding board member selection? Research focused on this question could assist nonprofit boards in evaluating their strengths and weaknesses in terms of their position along the continuum of organizational development. Research of this type could also focus on the development of the role of the executive director through various stages of

organizational development. The results of such research could assist boards in developing the skills of current board members as well as assist the process of recruiting new board members who possess expertise that matches the organization's current developmental stage. Appropriate roles for executive directors in board member recruitment might also be clarified through such research.

Research focused on the impact of governmental and other funding controls on the selection of new board members is also recommended. The results of such research might identify what kinds of organizations are most likely to have their boards impacted by government regulation or funder mandates. Information from this kind of research could also assist the nonprofit sector in clarification of its continuing partnership with government and other funders.

Another recommendation is for research on the process of recruiting under represented ethnic groups on various types of nonprofit boards. The findings of such research could help boards become more successful in enhancing their ethnic diversity. Such research could also help to identify which ethnic groups are actually represented on nonprofit boards generally, and whether the boards of specific kinds of organizations tend to be more homogeneous. Such information could help boards understand their biases (if any) for particular ethnic representation.

A final suggestion is for more research on the actual practice of board member selection as contrasted with the

prescribed model, comparing different types of nonprofit organizations in different geographical areas. Such research would help to broaden the rather limited perspective allowed by the current study.

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**Appendix A**  
**Subject Consent Form**  
**Research**

This is to certify that I, \_\_\_\_\_,  
hereby agree to participate as a volunteer in a research  
project with Bob Campbell as an authorized part of the  
educational and research program of the College of  
Professional Studies at the University of San Francisco,  
under the supervision of Kathleen Fletcher, Professor at  
USF.

The investigation and my part in the investigation have  
been explained to me, and I understand the explanation. The  
procedures of this investigation and their risks and  
discomforts have been described.

- I understand that I am free to not answer specific  
items or questions in the interview.
- I understand that any data or answers to questions will  
remain confidential with regard to my identity.
- I understand that the general results of the study will  
be made available to me, if requested.
- I understand that no other interventions or  
administrative decision will result from my  
participation in this study.
- **I FURTHER UNDERSTAND THAT I AM FREE TO WITHDRAW MY  
CONSENT AND TERMINATE MY PARTICIPATION AT ANY TIME.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Subject's Signature)

(Subjects address optional, provide if you wish results  
sent)

Street address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State and Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Protocol**  
**Nominating Committee Chair**

**Personal Background Information for Nominating Committee Chair**

1. current position held in the organization
2. length of time in current position
3. length of time with the organization in any capacity
4. total years of experience as a board member
5. total number of boards you've served on
6. gender
7. ethnicity
8. age: 20s \_\_\_ 30s \_\_\_ 40s\_\_\_ 50s\_\_\_ 60s \_\_\_ etc.
9. number of successive board terms with this organization

**Agency Information**

1. mission and target population
2. total expenditures for most recent fiscal year
3. total number of seats on the board of directors
4. total number of current board members
5. year agency founded
6. revenue sources

## Interview Protocol

### Interview Questions for Nominating Committee Chair:

1. How would you describe the stage of development the board is currently going through? Is the board more focused on mission or a business-like approach in its affairs? Is the organization staff or board dominated?
  - a. Was the stage of the board's development a consideration when evaluating the qualities you wanted in the new board member? How many executive directors have there been?
2. Was there more than one vacancy at the time the most recent board member was selected? How many prospects did you consider? If only one, why weren't there others?
  - a. How long has it been since all board seats were full?
  - b. What is your experience in filling vacancies on your board? Why? If difficult, what obstacles did you face?
3. Does the board have a committee charged with recruiting board members? If so, what is it called?
  - a. Did you have any input into the committee's role? If so please describe the nature of your input.
  - b. How would you rate the quality of the committee's input to the selection of the newest board member?
  - c. Do any written guidelines regarding the committee's role exist?
4. Describe the role of the executive director in the selection of the most recent board member.
  - a. Did you have any input into the executives role?
  - b. If the executive had a role, how would you rate the quality of her or his input?
  - c. Do any written guidelines regarding the executives role exist?
5. Describe the role of board members in the selection of

the newest board member.

- a. Did you have any input into the board's role?
  - b. If the board had a role, how would you rate the quality of its input?
  - c. Do any written guidelines regarding the board's role exist?
6. Did you use a process to assess the current strengths and weaknesses of your board to help you identify what qualifications you needed when you set out to recruit your newest board member? If so, describe the process including who was involved.
- a. What qualifications had been identified as important for the slot you were trying to fill?
  - b. Did other board members have the same qualifications in mind?
  - c. Were the qualifications sought a matter of written record?
7. After the prospect was suggested, were his or her qualifications evaluated? How and/or by whom?
- a. Was the prospect who filled the most recent board position interviewed to assess his or her interest in serving? If so, by whom?
8. Describe the process by which the new board member came to your attention.
- a. Who was the first person to speak with you about the prospect?
  - b. Who was the first person to speak with the prospective member about joining your board?
9. Describe the conversation, in which board members became informed that a prospect was being considered for the open seat.
- a. After this conversation how desirable, in your opinion, was the prospect for selection to the board?
  - b. How was the prospective member recommended to the board for election?
  - c. Who made the final decision that formally seated the newest board member? Did you agree with the final

decision?

10. In your opinion, are new board members well informed about the job of a board member, including being familiar with the mission and goals, financial condition, and financial contribution expected of him or her during the recruitment and selection process? If so, how do they get this information?
11. Is the selection of new board members important to you?
  - a. In your opinion is there any opportunity to impact organizational effectiveness through board member selection? Why or why not?
12. Is there anything that could be done to improve the selection process of new board members in your organization?

**Appendix C**

**Interview Protocol**

**Executive Director**

**Personal Background Information for Executive Director**

1. current position held in the organization
2. length of time in current position
3. length of time with the organization
4. total years of experience as a board member
5. total number of boards you've served on
6. gender
7. ethnicity
8. age: 20s \_\_\_\_ 30s \_\_\_\_ 40s \_\_\_\_ 50s \_\_\_\_ 60s \_\_\_\_ etc.

**Agency Information**

1. mission and target population
2. total expenditures for most recent fiscal year
3. total number of seats on the board of directors
4. total number of current board members
5. year agency founded
6. revenue sources

## Interview Protocol

### Interview Questions for Executive Director:

1. How would you describe the stage of development the board is currently going through? Is the board more focused on mission or a business-like approach in its affairs? Is the organization staff or board dominated?
  - a. Was the stage of the board's development a consideration when evaluating the qualities you wanted in the new board member? How many executive directors have there been?
2. Was there more than one vacancy at the time the most recent board member was selected? How many prospects did you consider? If only one why weren't there others?
  - a. How long has it been since all board seats were full?
  - b. What is your experience in filling vacancies on your board? Why? If difficult, what obstacles did you face?
3. Does the board have a committee charged with recruiting board members? If so, what is it called?
  - a. Did you have any input into the committee's role? If so please describe the nature of your input.
  - b. How would you rate the quality of the committee's input to the selection of the newest board member?
  - c. Do any written guidelines regarding the committee's role exist?
4. Describe your role in the selection of the most recent board member.
  - a. Did you have any input into your role? Do you share this role with others? If so, who?
  - b. If you had a role, how would you rate the quality of your input during the last board member selection?
  - c. Do any written guidelines regarding your role exist?
5. Describe the role of board members in the selection of the newest board member.
  - a. Did you have any input into the board's role?

- b. If the board had a role, how would you rate the quality of its input?
  - c. Do any written guidelines regarding the board's role exist?
6. Did you use a process to assess the current strengths and weaknesses of your board to help you identify what qualifications you needed when you set out to recruit your newest board member? If so describe the process including who was involved.
- a. What qualifications had been identified as important for the slot you were trying to fill?
  - b. Did all board members have the same qualifications in mind?
  - c. Were the qualifications sought a matter of written record?
7. After the prospect was suggested, were his or her qualifications evaluated? How and/or by whom?
- a. Was the prospect who filled the most recent board position interviewed to assess his or her interest in serving? If so, by whom?
8. Describe the process by which the new board member came to your attention.
- a. Who was the first person to speak with you about the prospect?
  - b. Who was the first person to speak with the prospective member about joining your board?
9. Describe the conversation in which board members became informed that a prospect was being considered for the open seat.
- a. After this conversation how desirable, in your opinion, was the prospect for selection to the board?
  - b. How was the prospective member recommended to the board for election?
  - c. Who made the final decision that formally seated the newest board member? Did you agree with the final decision?
10. In your opinion are new board members well informed about the job of a board member including being

familiar with the mission and goals, financial condition, and financial contribution expected of him or her during the recruitment and selection process? If so, how do they get this information?

11. Is the selection of new board members important to you?
  - a. In your opinion is there any opportunity to impact organizational effectiveness through board member selection? Why or why not?
12. Is there anything that could be done to improve the selection process of new board members in your organization?

**Appendix D**  
**Interview Protocol**  
**New Board Member**

**Personal Background Information for Newest Board Member**

1. current position held in the organization
2. length of time in current position
3. total length of time with the organizationtotal
4. number of years of experience as a board member
5. total number of boards you've served on
6. gender
7. ethnicity
8. age: 2's \_\_\_\_ 30s \_\_\_\_ 40s \_\_\_\_ 50s \_\_\_\_ 60s \_\_\_\_ etc.

**Agency Information**

1. mission and target population
2. total expenditures for most recent fiscal year
3. total number of seats on the board of directors
4. total number of current board members
5. year agency founded
6. revenue sources

## Interview Protocol

### Interview Questions for Newest Board Member:

1. Was there more than one vacancy at the time of your selection? If so how many?
  - a. Do you know if other prospects were being considered at the same time you were being considered? How do you know?
2. Do you know if the board has a committee charged with recruiting board members? If so, what is it called?
  - a. Were you aware of this committee during the time of your recruitment? If so how?
  - b. If there was a committee did it have a role in your selection?
  - c. If a role was identified for the committee how would you rate the quality of its role during your selection?
3. Did the exec. have a role in your selection to the board? If so describe his or her role in your recruitment and selection.
  - a. If the exec. had a role how would you rate the quality of her or his input to you during your selection?
4. Did the board as a whole have a role in your selection to the board? If so describe the board's role.
  - a. If board members had a role how would you rate the quality of their input to you during your selection?
5. Do you know if the board had assessed its strengths and weaknesses as a way of identifying the qualifications they sought in you? How do you know?
  - a. What characteristics or qualifications did you bring to the board?
  - b. Was the board seeking these same qualifications at the time of your selection? If yes how do you know?
  - c. Were the qualifications sought a matter of written record?
6. Describe the process by which you became aware that this organization had a vacancy on its board.

- a. Who was the first person to speak with you about board membership?
7. Did you have an interview with representatives of this organization in which you had an opportunity to describe your interest in serving on this board? If so by whom?
  - a. Did you come away from the interview thinking this organization desired to have you on their board? Why or why not?
  - b. How were you recommended to the board for election?
  - c. Who made the final decision that formally seated you as a board member?
8. In your opinion were you well informed about the job of a board member including being familiar with the mission and goals, financial condition, and financial contribution expected of you during your recruitment and selection process? If so, how did you get this information?
9. In your opinion is there any opportunity for you to have an impact on this organization's effectiveness in your role as a board member? Why or why not?
10. Is there anything that could be done to improve the selection process of new board members in your organization?

## **Appendix E**

### **Case Studies**

#### **Case Study A**

Organization A was founded in 1979 with the help of the Grey Panthers after the federal government had passed The Older Americans Act and required the establishment of Area Agencies on Aging to distribute federal money to seniors' programs. Organization A was established as a community-based alternative to local government to act as the "area agency of aging" to serve Santa Cruz, San Benito, and Monterey counties. Organization A was established with the specific purpose of assessing the needs of seniors 60 and older and to meet these needs through program development, the provision of grants to programs, services coordination, and advocacy. Revenues are derived primarily from federal and state government with small grants also coming from local government. Total expenses for the most recent fiscal year were three million dollars.

There is a total of 15 board seats with terms of two years. Each year in May the membership of Organization A, which now totals 300, nominates and elects its board members. In the most recent election nine seats were available. A total of 10 nominees ran for the seats including four incumbents. The four incumbents were re-elected as were five new board members. The executive director is a member and therefore, like all members, has one vote in the board member selection process. She is the

organization's first executive director and has held that position for 11 and a half years. For the first two and a half years the organization was run by the board members who hired a coordinator as their lead staff member.

The executive director, nominating committee chair, and newest board member were interviewed. The executive director has a total of over 20 years of board member experience with a total of 13 organizations. Her role in board member selection, as well as that of board members, is quite informal and consists of recruiting nominees and providing information to nominees who have questions about the organization during the election process. She describes her role in the selection of new board members as "one voice of many." At the time of the interview the nominating committee chair had been gone from the organization for six months. She resigned because she "didn't have the time and energy to give it [the organization] as I should." She had approximately 13 years of board member experience with four organizations. She'd been with this organization for a total of seven years. The new board member came to this organization with 30 years of board member experience with approximately five organizations. Like all newly-elected board members in Organization A, the new board member was seated in July following her election in May.

There is no formal process for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the current board, nor is there any profile that is used to help identify desired

characteristics sought in new board members. Essentially these purposes are accomplished at the annual meeting during the formal nomination and election process. The executive director reported that there is "some brainstorming" done at board meetings regarding characteristics desired in new board members. The executive and nominating committee chair did identify some specific characteristics including: interest in seniors issues and engagement with the seniors community; comfort in dealing with federal bureaucracy; a preference for seniors; and ethnic diversity. The executive director mentioned that the federal government requires geographical representation from residents of the three counties served. This goal was missed during the recent election. The nominating committee chair believes there is "not much control over setting characteristics because of the elections."

The federal government sets many regulations regarding the role and responsibilities of the executive director and of the board in the running of the organization. However, policy and procedures regarding board member selection are left completely up to the organization.

Organization A's board member selection process is the responsibility of the nominating committee and focuses on the annual election held at the annual meeting in May. For example, there are no interviews between board representatives and board prospects. Actually there are no board prospects. There are board candidates running for

election by the membership. The responsibilities of the nominating committee and procedures for the election are identified in the organization's bylaws.

There is a five-member nominating committee whose chair and two other members are elected by the organization's membership. The committee is technically responsible for finding board members. The board of directors appoints the two remaining nominating committee representatives. (For the most recent election the nominating committee chair had already resigned as a board member and therefore a total of three of the five nominating committee members were not members of the board). The executive director meets with the nominating committee to provide staff support.

The tasks of the nominating committee include making initial contacts with prospective nominees. For example, the new board member interviewed for this study came to know about Organization A through activities it sponsors. Her first contact regarding becoming a nominee was with the executive director. Once she expressed interest in nomination, the executive director referred her to the nominating committee. Except for information regarding the organization requested by the nominee, the executive had no other contact with the nominee prior to her election.

The nominating committee reviews nominee applications, makes initial phone calls to provide follow-up information on the election process, informs nominees of their responsibilities to qualify for election, obtains a

photograph and 200-word statement from each nominee describing their background and interest in being a board member, distributes this information to the membership, conducts the election during the annual meeting (including the formal acceptance of nominations) and informs the membership of election results.

Each nominee is given a written description of the role of a board member in the organization. However, there is no formal process for informing nominees of the mission, goals, and financial condition of the organization prior to election. After election in May newly-elected board members are seated in July. During July a four-hour orientation is provided and all board members attend.

Currently Organization A is using a consultant to assist with this orientation. This strategy has been invoked to help the board and staff as they struggle to balance the management of federal governmental regulations with a traditional grassroots approach to the accomplishment of the organization's mission.

### Case Study B

Organization B was founded in 1982 to provide a variety of mental health and chemical dependency services to children, adolescents, and adults in Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties. Originally organized as a for-profit business Organization B became a nonprofit organization in 1989. The current executive director is the remaining co-founder of this organization. Revenues are derived from a combination of government contracts and fee-for-service payments by clients, insurers, and Medi-Cal. Expenses for the most recent fiscal year were approximately \$900,000.

There are currently 13 board seats with three vacancies. There are no set terms for board members. Therefore, once elected, board members serve as long as they wish. Staff tend to set the board's agenda and board development is part of the current agenda. The board has no membership or other committee specifically charged with responsibilities related to board member selection.

The executive director, the secretary of the board, and the newest board member were interviewed for this study. The executive director holds the office of president of the board and is a voting board member. His four years with this agency comprise all of his nonprofit board experience. At the suggestion of the executive director, the board secretary was interviewed instead of a nominating committee chair. The board secretary, like the executive director, has four years of nonprofit board experience. She has been with

the organization a total of five years. Her role with the board also includes board development. Aside from being the board secretary, she currently works as the organization's acting chief financial officer. The new board member has been to one board meeting. He has more than 25 years of experience as a board member in six nonprofit organizations.

An ad-hoc committee of three board members including the executive director and board secretary identified eight board goals, two of which were increasing the number of board members and broader ethnic representation on the board. The secretary developed a list of qualifications desired in new board members through use of a matrix that identified current board members' strengths and weaknesses, with regard to demographics and individual expertise. This set of qualifications was recently ratified by the board. Some of the characteristics desired in a new board member were that they have fiscal, personnel, fundraising, small business, legal, and nonprofit expertise; exhibit a willingness to give time and be active; represent a geographical area not currently represented on the board; be representative of the consumer population; and contribute to the ethnic diversity of the board. The board secretary indicated that she hoped the board would soon take greater responsibility for, and participation in, the recruitment of individuals that would bring greater ethnic representation to the organization. She reported that the newest board member did not fill her desires for ethnic representation

nor consumer representation. She believed these characteristics could be brought to the board in the selection process for the four current vacancies. Therefore, she supported this new member's selection because of his extensive fiscal, fundraising, and board experience. The new board member identified these same characteristics as qualifications he possessed and for which he was being sought as a board member.

The new board member was interviewed by three board members: the executive director/board president, the board secretary, and another board member who is employed as the organization's chief financial officer, but is currently on maternity leave. The interview was accomplished over lunch and the objective was to assess the interests and qualifications of the prospective board member.

The prospect was suggested to the executive director of Organization B by an associate who is an executive director of another agency with which the prospect had served as a board member. The prospect was highly recommended for his nonprofit board experience and fundraising expertise. These two executive directors and the prospect had an informal lunch. It was after this initial meeting that the executive of Organization B suggested the prospect as a recruit to the board secretary. Generally in this organization the executive director participates actively in all phases of recruitment. No formal role for the executive is articulated in any written form within the organization. The role of the

executive director has evolved organically. The executive director recommended the new board member to the whole board by way of identifying qualifications and announcing his support.

The board as a whole voted to approve the prospect as a new member. The board may suggest potential members. The executive director suggested that greater board participation in finding prospective members would strengthen the organization's selection process.

The executive director, board secretary, and new board member believed that the information and process of this selection were structured well enough to provide the prospect with adequate information regarding the mission and goals of the organization as well as its financial condition. The executive director and secretary credited the new board member for asking questions during the interview that elicited much of this information about the organization. The new board member stated that the written material he received prior to the interview helped him "to know what he wanted to explore during the interview." No one in the organization mentioned a financial contribution as a requirement for board member selection. Both the executive director and secretary noted that the new board member "thought this should be a standard requirement for board membership." The new board member suggested that prospects be provided with a brief biography of each of the current board members during the recruitment process.

### Case Study C

Organization C was founded in 1977 to reduce violence against women through advocacy for social change and direct services to abused women; specifically women survivors of rape, incest, and domestic violence. The current executive director is the fourth in the organization's history and has been in her position for four years. Primary revenues for operating Organization C are derived from government grants. Fundraising activities help to balance the budget. Total expenses for the most recent fiscal year were \$450,000.

There are currently 21 board seats with two vacancies. There are no set terms of the membership on the board of directors. Members may serve as long as they like. The membership committee chair reported having recently instituted a process for removing board members, yet no board member has been asked to leave in the organization's history. The board is in transition from being more mission-focused to an emphasis on organizational management. After terminating the previous executive director, the board focused on hiring someone with skills related to organizational management. The current phase of organizational development was a consideration when identifying expertise desired in new board members during the most recent selection process. For example, the executive director stated that "nonprofit management was a priority for our last selection yet the board expressed concerns that most of the recently seated board members are

administrative types; they ask, 'What about survivors of violence?'" Recruitment responsibilities rest with the membership committee.

The executive director, membership committee chair, and one of the three newest board members were interviewed for this study. The executive director has a total of four years of nonprofit board experience with one organization. The membership committee chair has been in her position for the past five months. She also serves as the organization's board president. She has over 15 years of board member experience with nine organizations. The newest board member interviewed was seated two months ago. She had served as a board member of Organization C approximately six years ago, for a period of two years. She has a total of 17 years of board member experience with eight nonprofit boards.

The membership committee is responsible for board member recruitment and selection. The board as a whole, through its role in the strategic planning process, clarified the organization's operating principles and mission statement. The executive director reports that "implementation of these broad areas (as they relate to board member selection) was left very much up to the membership committee." Neither the executive director or the board have a formalized role in the selection of board members other than to provide input during the development of the strategic plan. The board is informed of membership committee activities during the committee's report at

monthly board meetings. The membership committee chair said she looked at openings on the board and talked to board members about their intention to stay or leave the board as a way of determining recruitment needs. She asked those who intended to leave what skills or expertise would be going with them. In this way she identified specific qualifications desired in new board members. The membership committee chair said, "I'm looking for people who clearly understand that being a board member is different than being a volunteer: being in a policy advisory role as opposed to providing direct services." Specific qualifications sought in the selection of the most recent board member included: nonprofit management skills; fiscal and personnel management skills; Latino representation; connections to the lesbian community; and men sensitive to feminist issues. Assessing her qualifications, the newest board member said, "I brought nonprofit board experience, fiscal and personnel expertise, and a commitment to the agency. I don't know if these skills were being sought."

The newest board member was interviewed by three board members and one staff person who all serve on the membership committee. The staff member was not the executive director. The membership committee chair reported that there is now a staff member on the membership committee because staff had no knowledge of who the board members were. "The staff weren't meeting them and there wasn't a connection." Putting a staff person on the membership committee, "seemed like an

easy way for staff to see who was coming in, who was being considered, and why they were being approved or not."

The membership committee votes to recommend prospects to the board. If the membership committee votes against recommendation the prospect is no longer considered for a vacant seat. In Organization C the membership committee has the power to veto prospects the board may be considering. The selection and recruitment process used by the membership committee is a matter of written record and is approved by the board as part of the strategic planning process.

The newest board member was suggested to the membership committee by a staff person. The newest board member recalls, "Through my working relationship with the agency one of the staff said 'Gee, I wish you'd come back on the board.' I got a call from the membership committee chair and the rest is history!" This staff person mentioned the recruit to the executive director who gave her full support. After the initial contact by the staff person, the membership committee chair guided the remainder of the selection process. The newest board member reported that after her interview with the membership committee "I felt the committee did a good job staying objective. It felt like a screening process, not a set up just to go through the process. When I left there I honestly didn't know whether they would invite me (onto the board) or not." The committee approved this prospect and recommended her to the board for a vote. The board approved and officially seated the new

board member. The executive director noted that "the board has never been known to turn down a recommendation from the committee." The new board member recalls that she was supposed to attend the meeting in which the board voted but "I missed the meeting because I wasn't available. But I think it would have been a little uncomfortable going and being voted on while I was there. It would have felt like a set-up. Could they have asked me any critical questions or really scrutinized me like I think a board would want to? It felt very rubber stampish to me."

The executive director, membership committee chair, and new board member agree that the information and recruitment process worked well to inform the new board member of the mission and goals of Organization C. The membership committee chair cited her contacts with the newest board member, the information contained in the board packet, the interview, and her openness regarding the organization's history as factors that helped to adequately represent the organization to the new board member. The new board member commented that "In the application packet it was very clear that they expected a financial contribution and the number of hours they expected every month. The packet made me really stop and think about 'Do I want to make this commitment.'"

### Case Study D

Organization D was founded in 1977 to alleviate hunger, malnutrition, poverty, and their causes. Services are available to seniors, children, low-income families, immigrants, and individuals living with disabilities. The current executive director is the third in the organization's history. Revenues are derived primarily from government grants. The organization also collects fees for services as well as income from fundraising activities. Total expenses for the most recent fiscal year were 6.5 million dollars.

The organization's bylaws allow for a range of 13 to 19 seats on the board of directors. There are currently 15 members on the board of directors. A year and a half ago, when the board was at its then maximum number of 16 members, the bylaws were amended to allow for the current maximum of 19 seats. The organization has never attained 19 seated directors. There are no set terms and seated directors may serve as long as they like.

The board president describes the organization as a "well run administrative agency." The executive director perceives the agency as being balanced between the accomplishment of its mission and operation as a business. He says, "Our mission is to provide services to the community, but we are a business. My board is responsible for running a 6.5 million dollar business with 240 employees."

The board has a membership committee with a primary responsibility for interviewing identified prospects being considered for board membership. The executive director notes that "the membership committee has never gotten formalized enough to choose a chair." However, the board president describes his role in board member selection as "being the chair of the membership committee." No written procedures exist for the role of the membership committee in board member selection.

The executive director, board president, and one of the two newest board members were interviewed. The executive director has been employed by the organization for the past 11 years and has been the executive director for the last five of those years. He has a combined total of some 45 years of experience as a board member with more than 13 organizations. The board president has served as a board member of Organization D for a total of 12 years and has been in the office of president for the past eight years. The newest board member has been with the organization for 10 months and he is currently acting as the board's treasurer. His selection as a board member of Organization D provides him with his first nonprofit experience.

There was no formal assessment of the current board's strengths or weaknesses to assist it in determining the qualities desired in new board members. However, the executive director reports that qualities sought are tied to organizational goals identified by the board during the

strategic planning process. The executive director said that he "uses his intuition" when deciding what kind of person is needed on the board; but added "if my intuition is not in synch with the goals identified in the strategic plan I've missed the boat." The board president recalls that "once in a while" at board meetings, "we naturally look around and see we have vacancies and talk about the kind of board members we'd like." Specific characteristics sought during the most recent board member selection process were: enthusiasm for fundraising; business expertise; financial expertise; and an individual who would add to the ethnic diversity of the organization. The new board member identified financial expertise and small business loan expertise as those qualifications he brought to the board. He reported that he thought it was for these skills that he was sought as a board member.

The newest board member was interviewed by membership committee representatives which included the board president, another board member, and a staff person who was not the executive director. The interview was performed over lunch. The interview was intended to expand on information contained in a board member application completed by the prospect and reviewed prior to the lunch meeting. The board president reported that the lunch meeting time was used to "focus on current organizational issues" and to help the recruit decide to accept election to a seat on the board. The board president says, "By the time of the committee

interview, the candidate is already an acceptable board member."

The prospect was identified by the executive director through a mutual affiliation. The executive director recalls, "I talked to the recruit until he said he'd be interested in joining my board. At that point my administrative assistant sent him an application." After the application was returned the administrative assistant sent it to the board president who arranged the luncheon interview. The executive director does most of the recruitment of new board members. He reports there are no written procedures that designate his responsibilities or those of other board members relative to member selection. He concludes that the feeling he gets from the board is that "if I want board members I should go find them myself."

The board president recalls that "when we [the membership committee] got the application we knew we were going to make things attractive for [the recruit] because the executive director wanted him on the board." The president of the board recommended the recruit to the full board. The full board voted at their meeting following the interview and the newest board member was formally seated.

Both the executive director and board president thought the new board member could have been better informed about the organization during the recruitment process. They both believed the mission is clearly identified but financial information and organizational goals could be better

clarified. The new board member said he felt well informed regarding the mission, goals and financial situation of the organization. He reported that this information was provided mostly through conversations with the executive director.

When asked if there was anything the organization could do to improve the selection process the executive director remarked, "Yes. This interview has made me realize that one thing I should make sure of is, since I'm doing most of the recruiting, that I and my existing board have the same ideas in mind as to what sort of characteristics we want in new board members. I should develop board member job descriptions so it is real clear to applicants what's expected of them and I should try to get the board itself involved in board member recruitment."

### Case Study E

Organization E was founded in 1984 to provide therapy services to abused and neglected children who range in age from two to 18 years and who are in foster care and adopted families. The organization also helps to target families who might be interested in providing foster care and adoption for abused and neglected children. The current executive director was the founder of Organization E. Major revenues for the organization are derived from various government sources. Expenses for the most recent fiscal year were 1.1 million dollars.

Currently there are nine board of director seats with three vacancies. The last time all board seats were full was three years ago. Over the past few years Organization E has added two board seats. There are no board terms; therefore board members may serve as long as they like. The average length of service for current board members is five years. Organization E has no committee charged with responsibilities related to board membership.

The executive director, board secretary, and one of the two newest board members were interviewed. The executive director is a voting member on the board. He has a total of 11 and a half years of experience as a board member on two nonprofit boards. The executive director suggested I interview the board's secretary because there is no nominating committee chair. The secretary has 14 years of board member experience with approximately three

organizations. She's been a member of the board of directors of Organization E for three years and has held the office of secretary of the board for one and a half years. The newest board member interviewed has been with the organization for one year. She has four years of experience as a board member with a total of three organizations.

The responsibility for board member selection in Organization E falls to the executive director. The secretary reported that the executive director "is aggressive in trying to find quality board members." Through the use of a matrix the staff and board assess "what we have, what we're missing, and what we need" relative to current board member expertise. The secretary adds that because the board is so small "It becomes very clear within a short period of time those deficits we have or those voids that we have on the board." She reported that there is no formalized process for board member selection in Organization E.

Specific characteristics sought in the new board member were marketing and fundraising expertise, compatibility with other board members, and a commitment to give the time necessary to complete board tasks. The characteristics sought in new board members have followed the shifting needs of the executive director. Historically the organization has sought legal expertise, professionals from the field of therapy, and individuals with favorable political connections within the community. The executive director

described the organization as having developed from a "defensive board that could protect us politically and legally because of specializing in working with sexually abused kids when we first began, to a rubber stamp board, and now to the board being quite active." The secretary agrees and sees the board "becoming more involved with the actual functioning of the organization and its policies." She adds, "I think it might be difficult for our executive director at the present because he's not calling all the shots." Both the executive director and secretary agree about the changing character of the board and note resultant changes in the characteristics being sought among new board members. They identify the most important characteristics for new board members as ability to make a commitment of time to the work of the board, and expertise in fundraising and marketing. The new board member identified these areas as those for which she was most qualified and for which she believes she was being sought for board membership.

There was no formal interview of the new board member. The executive director had served on another board with the prospect. Through this connection he asked her to join the board of Organization E. Over a period of approximately three months the executive director persuaded the prospect to attend a board meeting. The newest board member recalled that she went to the board meeting to "present a joint fundraising proposal" that her board and the board of Organization E could work on together. At that meeting, she

said board members of Organization E suggested to the executive director, that he invite her to join the board. She reported that the executive director said, "Well, I have invited her and that's another reason she's here." The newest board member recalls, "I felt some underlying strife -- people watching the clock, that kind of thing. They believed in what the agency was doing, however they were very busy, had a limited amount of time, and were stretched in many ways." She observed that because of this "they weren't coming completely together and working as a unit." The newest board member was voted in by the whole board at the following board meeting.

Neither the executive director nor the board has a formal role articulated with regard to member selection. The secretary said "We are all looking, searching for new members with talents. It actually hasn't been very successful to be real honest." The newest board member recalled a formalized recruitment she'd gone through when becoming a member of a nonprofit hospital board. She said the recruitment for Organization E "was very much more informal." The executive director, secretary, and new board member reported that there was little in the way of education about the agency, its goals, or its financial condition during the selection process. The new board member reported, "It would have helped me if I received more information about the organization, because now when I talk to people about it, it's difficult to come up with certain

information because it's never been presented to me."

"I joined because I was interested in the agency's mission," says the new board member. "But mostly I joined because I felt that I could bring something to them; I could help the agency be more effective."

### Case Study F

Organization F was founded in 1978 to provide physical, emotional, and spiritual support services to patients with terminal illness, their care givers and families, and to individuals who are experiencing the recent loss of a family member or friend. In 1983 Organization F hired its first paid executive director and she continues to hold that position. The majority of revenues are derived from fundraising activities. The organization also obtains revenue from Medi-Cal, Medi-Care, and clients' private health insurance, as well as a small amount from government grants. Expenses for the most recent fiscal year were 1.1 million dollars.

The bylaws of Organization F allow for 11 to 21 board seats. There are currently 12 seated directors on the board. The number of board seats filled over the past 10 years has been between 12 and 15; and throughout the organization's history there have never been fewer than 11. Board terms are three years in length and an individual may serve two consecutive terms. The nominating committee chair describes the organization as being in transition from a mission focused "grassroots organization" to an organization "needing to run the business in a sophisticated enough way that we can continue to accomplish the mission." She sees the organization as board-dominated and believes the current developmental stage of the organization was an important consideration in the selection of the newest board member.

The executive director, nominating committee chair, and newest board member were interviewed. The executive director has served on four boards and has 12 years of board member experience. Her role in board member selection includes membership on the nominating committee, acting as staff for the committee and board, guiding the process of the selection, and orienting new board members. Her role is not formally described in any written procedures. It has developed out of what needs to be done.

The nominating committee chair has been active in Organization F since its founding in 1978 and has served a total of five years during that time as a board member. Currently she is in her third year of her current board term. She is the first nominating committee chair and has been in this role for the past 10 months. She also serves as the vice president of the board. In total she has eight years of board experience with two nonprofit boards.

The newest board member was seated two months ago. She has approximately 27 years of board experience on five boards.

The board has recently created a standing nominating committee which was active in the most recent board member selection process. The committee has a written procedure that includes time lines for the completion of specific tasks. The nominating committee chair acted as a committee of one and with the executive director participated in the selection of the most recent board member. She looks forward

to further developing the committee by recruiting a "dedicated number of committee members." She envisions a committee of two board members, two community members and herself. Prior to the creation of the position of nominating committee chair, the board president assumed that function as needed.

The executive director and nominating committee chair created a matrix of desired board member characteristics. This was used as a self-assessment tool by the board and helped to identify current expertise and demographic characteristics represented on the board. The newest board member reported that "the one thing they had me do at my first meeting was to check off my skill strengths on the matrix. So it seems to me they have approached their membership from a matrix of skills and I was encouraged by that." Specific characteristics sought in the new board member were knowledge of the health care system, nonprofit board experience, financial management skills, expertise in fundraising, and a commitment of time to the organization's activities. The newest board member possess these characteristics and identified them as her strengths.

The newest board member was interviewed by the executive director and nominating committee chair. Prior to the interview the recruit had received a packet of information about the organization that included the mission statement, organizational goals, financial statements, and a description of board member expectations. The recruit had

provided a resume to the organization prior to the interview. The executive director reported that the packet also included a statement to the recruit that a financial commitment to the organization would be expected in an amount "that's significant" to the new board member. Much of what was covered in the packet was reiterated during the face-to-face interview, and time commitment received special attention. The commitment of financial support was not mentioned, although the newest board member recalls, "I was aware they depended on donations a lot."

The board vacancy arose when a current board member who had acted as a liaison between Organization F and a major health care provider in the community decided to resign because of a career opportunity. The executive director quipped, "I basically said you need to replace yourself" because it was important for us to continue our relationship with this health care provider. The resigning board member made the first contact with the prospect. They had worked together as employees of the health care provider. At the board meeting following this contact the executive director reported that an interested prospect had been identified. The prospect's qualifications were discussed by the board. The resigning board member provided input during this meeting. The board decided the prospect was very desirable and instructed the executive director and nominating committee chair to continue the recruitment. The new board

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member was seated by a vote of the full board after being formally recommended by the nominating committee chair.

Usually the agency's board member selection occurs between September and December, with new board members being seated in January. The last time this process was followed six individuals were considered for three seats. The executive director, nominating committee chair, and newest board member agree that prospects are well informed of the mission and goals of the organization during the recruitment process. The nominating committee chair and newest board member felt that information about the financial condition of the organization and financial contribution expected of the candidates could be improved. The executive director said, "We make a good attempt but it takes people about a year to really get on board" with the level of detail that allows them to be a productive board member.

"The current board and the new members we've added over the past two years want to help decide our future, particularly in health care and survival in the nonprofit world," says the executive director. She believes board member selection is crucial to the effective operation of the organization. She adds that board members "need to be pretty savvy and they need to want to learn. Their role in strategic planning, their connections to the community, and their power they bring to the agency is really critical to our survival." She concluded that, "to stay community based

we need to involve people from the community (on our board)  
in a way that they feel some ownership in the organization."

### Case Study G

Organization G was founded in 1983 to provide housing and services for homeless families so that they can obtain permanent housing. These services assist parents and their children and provide both shelter and transitional housing. The current executive director has been with the organization for four months. The major revenue sources are gifts and donations derived through various fundraising strategies. Organization G also obtains funding from the United Way, client fees, and government sources. Total expenses for the most recent fiscal year were \$315,000.

There are currently 12 board of director seats, all filled. Terms are four years in length with a second term possible. At the conclusion of the second term a board member must leave board service. The board tends to set the organization's agenda. The former executive director, who had been with the organization for 10 years, said that the board feels very, very responsible (for the organization) because they realized they no longer had that relationship with someone who had really done a lot to make the organization work. The board established the nominating committee and community relations committee to be responsible for identifying prospective board members to fill vacant seats.

The former executive director, the nominating committee chair, and the newest board member were interviewed. Because of her short length of time with the organization, the

current executive director suggested that the former executive director would be more informative for the purposes of this research. The former executive director was Organization G's first executive director and was with the organization for a total of 10 years. She left the organization to pursue other interests four months ago. She has had no experience as a member on a nonprofit board of directors.

The nominating committee chair has held that office for one year and has been with Organization G for three and a half years. She has over 20 years of board experience with approximately eight organizations.

The new board member has been with the organization five months and has had five years of board experience with one other organization.

The former executive director has been active in developing the board member selection procedures over the past 10 years. With input from board members and the nominating committee the process is updated on an ongoing basis. The former executive director considered it her responsibility to ensure the process found its way into written procedures. There are formal roles and written procedures for the executive director, nominating committee, and board with regard to board member selection.

The executive director's role is as a liaison between the nominating committee and board. The board as a whole makes any final decisions. The nominating committee keeps a

list of potential prospects. Some prospects have been on the list for more than three years before coming onto the board. The nominating committee is responsible for maintaining contact with individuals on the list.

A grid, created and updated by the board, is used to identify "networks" of constituency within the community, i.e. established in community, new in community, education, agriculture, small business, medical profession, etc. Current board members also appear on the grid. Prospects on the nominating committee's list are similarly identified. The board is also looking for other specific characteristics in new board members including: ability to give time; fundraising capabilities; gender and ethnic balance; varied professional expertise; compassion for people who are poor; an interest in homelessness issues; and willingness to donate financially to the organization. When a vacancy occurs the nominating committee suggests prospects relative to needs that appear on the grid. It is not a requirement that prospects come off the nominating committee's list. The board as a whole, with input from the executive director, decides which prospect will be pursued.

The former executive director quipped, "To hell with the grid if we had a passionate person who we knew was going to come in and be interested and concerned and make a difference in the group." She added that the problem with this attitude is that it can overload the board with representation from one area of the grid and sacrifice

diversity. In the most recent selection the prospect did not fill the desire of increased Latino representation on the board. The nominating committee chair believes the recruitment process would be better if "recruitment of representatives of Latino origin" took more priority. However, she added we need to learn "how to make contact" with that constituency.

In the most recent selection the new board member was "new" to the organization, i.e. she did not come from the nominating committee's list. She had been a former donor and for several years was active in one of the organization's annual fundraising events. She was known by the executive director and nominating chair. Her name was suggested at a board meeting by the nominating committee chair and she was approved by the board. Once the board approved pursuing this prospect the former executive director's role was to "follow the procedure step-by-step, and keep the process moving and finish it." This included scheduling interviews and involving board and committee members per procedure.

The nominating committee chair contacted the prospect and furnished a board packet which included the application. The nominating committee reviewed the application and reviewed all information available about the prospect including input from the executive director, board, relevant community members, and friends of the organization. During this time the former executive director provided the prospect with a tour of the facilities. The prospect also

attended one board meeting prior to election. Upon completion of these activities the prospect was interviewed by two nominating committee representatives and the former executive director. The findings were reported to the board and the prospect was approved. The actual vote by the whole board was first on the agenda at the following board meeting. The prospect was asked to come to the meeting after the vote and at that same meeting was formally seated. Both the former executive director and the nominating committee chair believe the newest board member was very well informed of Organization G's mission, goals, and financial condition prior to being seated. The newest board member agreed.

The former executive director believes that board member selection is "vital to the organization." She said, "If people understand their roles in the organization and the mission is viable, then you enhance the power to move the organization by having 12, 13, 15, 20 really dynamic people working to make it go."

### Case Study H

Organization H was founded in 1973 as a membership organization for the purpose of providing seniors 55 and older with supplemental groceries on a weekly basis. The current membership is 3,000. The executive director has been in her position for the past five years. She has held this position longer than any of the eight executive directors in the organization's history. Revenues are derived in equal amounts from government grants, dues, and fundraising activities, and from a recycling business run by the organization. Total expenses for the most recent fiscal year were \$350,000.

There are a total of 17 board seats with three vacancies. The last time that all seats were filled was approximately three years ago. There are two separate processes by which an individual may be seated on the board: by election of the membership, or by appointment of the board. The executive director describes the appointments as being "available for community leaders or people with special skills." In this way, the president said the board has the option to help itself by filling the open seats with individuals who possess specific expertise currently lacking on the board. The board is limited to three appointees at any one time. A three-quarters majority vote of the board is required to seat an appointee. An appointee can only serve until the next election and then must run for election by the membership. In the history of the organization an

incumbent in this situation has never lost his or her seat. The most recent board member was seated by the appointment process.

Elections are held on even-numbered years for half the board seats. The last election process was accomplished in May of 1992. There were eight seats available and eight individuals were nominated for those seats. Therefore all nominees were elected by simple majority of the membership.

Terms of board membership are four years. A board member may serve two consecutive terms, after which the seat must be resigned. After a year off the board, a board member may return for service either by election or by appointment. There is no limit on the number of nonconsecutive terms.

There is no standing nominating committee. An ad-hoc election committee is formed for the specific purpose of carrying out the election every two years. For appointments the board acts as a committee of the whole. Policies and procedures for both types of board member selection are specified in the bylaws of Organization H.

The executive director, board president, and newest board member were interviewed. The executive director has been with organization for five years. She has four years of experience as a board member with three organizations. The president of the board described the executive director's role in board member selection as "only to make recommendations. She has no authority at all" in the final decision.

The board president has served on the board for seven years and is in his second term. He has held the office of president just over three years. He has 30 years of experience as a board member and has served on six boards. The newest board member has over 35 years of board member experience. Before his recent resignation due to the consecutive term restrictions imposed by Organization H he had served for five years as a board member of the organization including time as president of the board. At the close of his second consecutive term he told the board that after the mandatory interval had passed he would like to return to board service. Three months ago he was again seated on the board through the appointment process.

Because of the membership nomination and election process there is no formal assessment by the board of its current strengths and weaknesses as a way of identifying desired qualifications for new board members. The executive director says that prior to the election "I identify expertise and qualifications I think are needed on the board to volunteers through informal conversations." The organization has 500 active volunteers. The executive director's formal role is as staff to the election committee. She is also welcomed to make suggestions to the board on what she regards as current needs for board membership. The executive director says, "I have let the board become the owners of their own organization because that's what I believe in. I don't want to direct the board

of directors; I want them to tell me what to do." The board president says, "the executive director runs the physical operation of the plant under the policies set by the board of directors. She's our city manager; that's who she is."

For the most recent selection the board and executive director identified the need for an individual with the following specific characteristics: legal expertise, familiarity with the organization's activities; and a demonstrated commitment to giving time to community projects. These were cited because the organization is planning to expand through the acquisition of property. Prior to selection the board included no members who had legal expertise. Because they were between elections, and the board was not then at its maximum of three appointees, the decision was made to seat the new board member through the appointment process.

Two prospects with the desired characteristics were identified. The first prospect was contacted but did not show an interest in becoming a board member. As time passed and desire to fill the board vacancy grew, the executive director spoke to the board president and suggested that the former board member be considered for the appointment. Because of the former board member's service with the organization the president felt he would be a highly desirable candidate. The president suggested the former board member as a prospect for the seat at a board meeting. However, the board noted that the required interval of one

year had not passed since the candidate had last served on the board. The executive director said that at this point the board created an amendment to the bylaws allowing it to waive the interval between consecutive terms in special cases when the board considered it would be advantageous for the organization. After approving this amendment the board instructed the president to contact the former member and offer him the seat. Three months later the former board member was appointed to a new term by a vote of the whole board.

In this most recent selection process there was no interview because the board and the board president were very familiar with the recruit and the recruit was very familiar with the organization, its goals, and its financial condition.

In the usual selection process which requires election, there is no formal interview. Instead all 3,000 members receive a letter informing them an election is coming up and requesting suggestions for nominations. A letter is sent to all those nominated asking if they are interested in accepting nomination. Contained in the letter is information about the job and the commitment expected of board members, and the organization's mission, current goals, and financial condition. Those who express an interest complete a short biography which is sent to all members with a ballot. An ad-hoc election committee, comprised of members of the organization, is selected to oversee the election process

and to count the votes. The executive director, who acts as staff to the election committee, said "we're actually overly meticulous" about the election process and the counting and recording of the votes. After election in May, all new board members are oriented by the executive director in June. They also attend the June board meeting at which the annual budget is presented. They are formally seated in July. To date no elected board member has declined to serve between election in May and seating in July. The executive director, board president, and newest board member agree that all new board members are well informed about their roles and the work of the organization by the time they are seated on the board.

The president of the board of Organization H believes board members can potentially increase the effectiveness of the organization. "If you're looking at a wheel, the board is the hub," he explained. "You may have a lot of spokes but if they don't all meet together at the hub you're going to have one hell of a lopsided wheel, and it won't roll. With our hub holding all the spokes together, which is our membership, we roll smoothly."

### Case Study I

Organization I was founded in 1978 to provide year round quality child care to families in Santa Cruz County. Children from 12 months to 5 years of age are accepted. There have been three executive directors over the past year and a half including the current executive director who has been with the organization for five months. There have been five executive directors in the 15-year history of the organization. Most of the organization's revenue is derived from parent fees and fundraising activities. Total expenses for the most recent fiscal year were \$277,000.

There are currently nine board seats and there is one vacancy. Terms run from October to September concurrent with the school year. There is no limit on the number of successive terms. The executive director and two lead teaching staff are voting members of the board and occupy one third of the available seats. Staff tend to set the agenda for the board. During the most recent selection four seats were available. The board has no committee charged with responsibilities related to board membership.

The executive director, board president, and one of the four newest board members were interviewed. The executive director has four years of experience on one nonprofit board. Because there is no nominating committee chair, the executive director suggested I interview the board president.

The president has been a board member of Organization I

for just over two years and has served as president for the past 10 months. She has a total of more than 12 years of board member experience on seven nonprofit boards. The newest board member has been with the organization for one month and has served as treasurer for one month. She has no previous board member experience.

Board member recruitment is the responsibility of the president or executive director. In the most recent selection the responsibility fell to the executive director. There is no formalized process by which the current board is assessed to ascertain what expertise is needed in new members. For the most recent selection, the executive director said she "made up the process," and that she did not know how selection had been accomplished in the past. The president said, "Parents have incentive to be on the board because they must make a commitment to three hours of volunteer work per month, and board membership meets this requirement."

The most important characteristics sought were: a one year commitment to board service; volunteering and working on one committee; a commitment of time to complete board tasks; an interest in child care activities; and energy and enthusiasm for the mission.

The executive director noted that she'd like to see "more discussion from the whole board as to what they would want and what we need relative to expertise" prior to recruiting board members.

The new board member identified her interest in the mission of the organization, ability to give time, and her desire to learn as the qualifications she brought to the board. She recalls, "I saw the board needed members and anyone who showed interest and could make the commitment was immediately welcomed."

There was no formal interview process. Instead the prospective board members were invited to a board meeting. The newest board member reported, "There were five (seated) board members there and the four of us showed up with interest to join." During that board meeting the president introduced the four prospects. The executive director presented information regarding their qualifications from what she had learned through informal conversations with them. Each of the prospects also had a chance to speak. They were invited to stay for the rest of the meeting to observe the board and to become familiar with some of its current issues. This was a time for the board to evaluate the prospects and for the prospects to consider their interest in joining the board. The executive director recalled, "The board was so desperate at this point I think they were happy to get some warm bodies in there and delighted that the warm bodies seemed so competent and enthusiastic."

The newest board member was recruited by the executive director through informal contacts. The executive director spoke with the president of the board about the recruit. There is no formal role in board member selection

articulated for the executive director or the board president. The process happens informally and is predicated on the necessity of seating board members.

All four prospects were invited back to the board meeting following the one which they had observed. While in attendance at the meeting they were recommended for the open seats by the board president. Upon this recommendation the whole board voted and officially seated the four prospects.

The executive director and board president believe new board members are well informed about the mission and goals of the organization. Each parent receives written information about the mission and goals in their parent handbook at the time they register their child in the center. Through contact with their child's teacher, parents become well acquainted with the operation of the center. Once a parent expresses an interest in board membership the executive director gives them a copy of the bylaws and a one-page description of the duties of a board member in the organization. The newest board member recalls, "I got a lot of written stuff but I wasn't told things." The executive director believes prospective board members would be better informed if the board packets were "ready to go so that prospective board members could look over materials and have time to formulate questions."

The executive director, president, and newest board member believe board member selection is an important function of the organization. The newest board member

concluded, "There are great opportunities for me (to impact organizational effectiveness) because there is room for improvement and room for doing things more efficiently and effectively, in my opinion -- and I'm bringing enthusiasm and positive energy to help."

### Case Study J

Organization J was founded in 1976 as a for-profit business to provide treatment to adults 18 years and older and their families who have been affected or damaged by the use of alcohol or other drugs. In 1980 Organization J was reorganized as a nonprofit organization with the same mission statement. The current executive director has been with Organization J for the past 12 years. Total expenses for the most recent fiscal year were 1.6 million dollars, two-thirds of which came from client fees including insurance and private payments, while the remaining third came from local government contracts.

At the time of the most recent board member selection there were 15 board seats with one vacancy. Board of director terms are two years with an unlimited number of successive terms possible. Though a membership committee exists, its work is done at regular board meetings held monthly. There was no membership committee chair identified. The executive director noted that the mission statement is used to organize and direct the activity of the board. He also adds that "the mission is balanced against a business like approach to financing organizational goals and activities."

The executive director, board secretary, and the newest board member were interviewed. The executive director has been with the agency for 12 years and has more than 42 years of board experience with 14 organizations. Because the

organization has no nominating committee chair the executive director suggested the board secretary for the interview. The board secretary has been with Organization J for two years. This is his first nonprofit board experience. The newest board member has been with the organization for three months. He has over 20 years of board experience with six organizations.

The most recent board member selection process began at a board meeting in which the executive director identified the need to fill a vacancy. He also identified the need for recruiting a person who was familiar with law enforcement and the courts. No formal process exists to help the board identify its strengths and weaknesses in preparation for assessing the characteristics sought in a new board member. However, both the executive director and the board secretary agree that board members are aware of the general characteristics desired in new board members. Some of these characteristics are: ethnic diversity, gender balance, and expertise in the areas of accounting, law, education, business, medicine, and chemical dependency. The board secretary noted that the most important considerations were not so much what recruits bring to the organization regarding expertise in a particular profession, but willingness to work with others in the organization and willingness to commit time. The new board member did not identify law enforcement or familiarity with the courts as qualities for which he was sought. He believes he was

recruited for board membership because of his past experience on boards and his small business expertise.

The candidate was suggested by the board president at the board meeting following the president's announcement that a vacancy needed to be filled. The board president knew the prospect and was familiar with his connection to the criminal justice system. The board agreed that this candidate would be a good person to fill the vacancy. The board president was assigned the task of phoning the prospect to ascertain his interest in service on the Organization J board of directors. The candidate was not formally interviewed but did complete an application.

The candidate was first contacted by Organization J when the board president phoned him to ask if he was interested in becoming a board member. The candidate indicated that he would accept the seat if it were offered to him. At the next board meeting a vote was taken of board members and the candidate was accepted onto the board. The new board member recalls that "accepting the position was up to me. It wasn't like I was applying for a job. It was my option."

The executive director and board of directors all participate in the recruitment and selection process and the process takes place within the context of the monthly board meeting. Though the bylaws identify a committee for board membership, there is no formal charge or identified procedures for the committee to follow. Similarly, neither

the executive director or the board have formalized roles. The process flows naturally from the historical experience of filling past vacancies on the board. The board secretary said that, "eighty percent of us involved with the organization are in recovery, lots of us know each other. It isn't often that a person is asked to join who isn't known by at least half of us there." He concluded that the process is "informal but effective."

The newest board member felt that there was insufficient information provided regarding Organization J's mission, goals, and financial condition during his selection process. He did not initiate contact with either the executive director or the board president to ask questions about the organization prior to his selection. After selection he did receive a board information packet that included organizational financial statements and described the responsibilities of the board members. There is no financial contribution expected as a requirement for board membership.

The executive director believes prospects could be better informed during the selection process. "We could increase this process but we are restricted by resources, both of money and time," He said.