

Governing Body Recruitment

1. Introduction

CMA Standards Council's standard 4.2 reads as follows:

"4.2 The governing body must have a selection process for recruiting appropriately skilled and diverse members."

The purpose of this Resource Paper is to give some guidance about:

- (a) what a selection process could look like; and
- (b) what diversity looks like.

Of course, we are not putting this forward as a required template, as each organisation is different and will have its own requirements. Nevertheless, this Resource Paper may provide a starting point to help stimulate discussion.

2. Biblical background

The following three passages are very relevant to these issues. Please note that references to "men" should these days of course be read as references to "men and women".

(a) Acts 1: 21-26

²¹ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, ²² beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.

²³ So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." ²⁶ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

(b) 1 Timothy 3: 1-7

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

(c) 1 Corinthians 12: 12-20

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

These passages provide a sound context for and introduction to the process for recruitment of members of your governing body.

The first passage above, from Acts, describes how the Apostles chose a replacement for Judas after he betrayed Jesus. Note that the Apostles first identified the type of experience and skills they needed in the candidate. In this case they identified personal knowledge of Jesus as the required experience and the ability to be a witness as the required skill set.

In the second passage, Paul spoke of the importance of personal character, integrity and deep roots as a believer.

In the third passage Paul was emphasising the importance of diversity in the church and, by extension, its agencies. It is in blending all the different parts of the body together that a fully functioning and effective body is created. Leaving parts out will only lead to less effective performance.

The CMA Standards Council believes these passages should be the touchstone when governing bodies consider the recruitment of new members.

Modern governance theory echoes the timeless wisdom of God’s word. It suggests that governing body members are there to serve the organisation rather than their own interests. It also states that diversity of skills (both training and day to day practice), experience (both life experience and knowledge of the organisation and its context), and demographics (which could for example include gender, ethnicity, cultural background, age and physical/mental disabilities) is important for many reasons, including:

- A good governing body should broadly reflect the demographics of the people the organisation serves, its staff and its donors, so as to understand them properly
- Viewing issues and new trends from different perspectives will help reduce “blind spots” and lead to a more rounded and creative approach
- Greater diversity will mean more adaptability and sensitivity to issues
- Greater diversity will lead to a better reputation and brand

In particular, many governing bodies today are accused of being “pale, male and stale”. While there may be some very limited circumstances where this is appropriate, in general such a position would appear incongruent with Paul’s letter to the Corinthians cited above. Even if a wholly male governing body were otherwise very responsible and diligent, from a reputational perspective, the organisation could be adversely affected by a lack of gender diversity given modern community standards. And it’s not just about appearances: the lack of female perspectives in the deliberation process self-evidently deprives the group of a perspective shared by half of the population.

Governing bodies are typically constructed one member at a time as members come and go. Accordingly, cultivating an appropriate mix of skills, experience and demographics becomes an art form, and typically candidates will be sought who have to tick several boxes on the skills and diversity fronts.

2. The recruitment process

Every organisation must develop its own process, which is suitable for that organisation. Set out below is a description of a typical process. You may amend or supplement it as required for your own circumstances.

The recruitment process generally involves the following steps:

- (a) Prayer and commitment of the process to God
- (b) Reviewing the current position and identifying the needs
- (c) Finding the candidates
- (d) Choosing the most appropriate candidate

We shall look briefly at each of these steps in detail.

(a) Prayer and commitment of the process to God

Your organisation is honouring God, carrying out God’s work and pointing people towards God. God needs to be involved in the important task of choosing your organisation’s leaders. Enough said!

(b) Reviewing the current position and identifying the needs

The first step is to work out who is managing the process. Recruitment can be a task for the whole of the governing body, or for a committee (often called a nominations committee). Sometimes it can be helpful to include outsiders in the process, either volunteers with experience in this area, or professional “headhunters”. The route you choose will be governed by your resources and the requirements of your own circumstances.

Generally speaking, a governing body will already have a mix of skills, experience and demographics. However, rarely will it be perfect (as the needs of the organisation change over time) and often recruitment will occur in the context of a person leaving the governing body, whose departure alone will change the mix.

The next step in this part of the process is to review again the purpose of the organisation and its mission, and then consider what mix of skills, experience and demographics would be best to develop and monitor the organisation and its strategy over say the next 5 years to achieve that purpose and mission.

Finally, you will compare the skills, experience and demographics of the current governing body against that ideal and identify the gaps. These gaps will form the basis of the specific characteristics you seek in a new member of your governing body.

One way (but not the only way!) of approaching the task of reviewing the skills of your governing body is to use our Board Skills Matrix document. Please note however that this Matrix does not cover experience and demographics, so you would need to review these issues as well.

After you have identified the particular gaps you have in relation to skills, experience and demographics, they should then be used as a basis for a written position description.

(c) Finding the candidates

There are many ways of finding candidates. They include:

- The networks of existing members of the governing body
- The networks of former long-serving and respected members of the governing body
- Your own organisation's membership base
- Donors to and other supporters of your organisation and their networks
- Current or former users of your organisation's services
- Advertising in appropriate forums (eg via CMA Connect, the AICD website, alumni of The Board Internship or through a sector group of which your organisation is a member)

When you have identified some potential candidates who you think may fit the position description, you should start approaching the candidates. The usual approach is for a person involved in the recruitment process who knows the potential candidate to approach him or her informally and ask if they would be interested in exploring the possibility of applying for the position. This approach would include telling the potential candidate some high-level information about the organisation and its mission, some details about the types of characteristics being sought and a general idea about the time commitment involved. If there is a willingness to move forward, it is important to tell the potential candidate of the following steps (set out below), so that they know what to expect.

The next step in this part of the process is to give an information pack to the prospective candidate, which could include the following:

- Your website address
- Your Constitution
- Your last Annual Report
- Your most recent audited accounts
- Some of your marketing material
- The names and a one paragraph CV of the existing members of your governing body
- Details of the commitment required (eg, number, location and timing of meetings, whether travel costs are reimbursed, donation expectations (if any) etc)

You should then tell the prospective candidate that he/she will need to submit a CV if they wish to proceed and then meet with one or more of the recruitment team, the CEO and the Chair to discuss the role and the candidate's suitability before the organisation makes its final decision. The CV should include the names and contact details of referees.

(d) Choosing the most appropriate candidate

The next step is to assess the candidates against the relevant criteria, speak to referees, if appropriate prepare a shortlist, and then make a recommendation to the group making the appointment (set out in the Constitution, but typically the governing body, or the governing body for an interim appointment to be ratified by the members at the next general meeting, or the members directly).

The relevant criteria for assessment would usually be (in order of importance):

- Godliness – is this candidate a person of faith and deep roots in his/her church?
- Good character – does this candidate meet the tests set out by Paul in 1 Timothy and the legal requirements for eligibility?
- Understanding of governance – does this candidate “get” governance, and that it is different from hands-on management?
- Specific criteria – does this candidate meet all or enough of the specific characteristics set out in your position description?
- Fit – does this candidate have the inter-personal skills to fit well with the existing governing body to form a diverse yet cohesive group which can advance the purpose of the organisation?
- Presentability – will this candidate be presentable to stakeholders in the organisation (eg staff, users of services, donors and other supporters)?

Prayer, discernment of God’s plans and the Holy Spirit’s guidance are particularly important in this phase. Frankly it is unlikely, even if there is one stand-out candidate, that this candidate will be absolutely perfect. Accordingly, there will be a balancing act involved. You should remember that governing body members develop over time and can learn new skills and gain new experience. In addition, some skills can be hired by the organisation. Godliness and good character are less likely to change and cannot be hired.

You should also remember that sometimes the right decision is not to proceed at all if none of the candidates is acceptable. If this occurs, it is best to thank the candidates for their time and interest, close the process without an appointment, wait for a period of say 6 to 12 months, and then start afresh.

Above all, the Holy Spirit’s guidance is paramount. If the governing body feels a strong call from the Holy Spirit to appoint or recommend a particular candidate, even if he/she does not look the best on paper, then follow the Holy Spirit.

If the final choice is not to be made by the governing body, it may be appropriate for the governing body to make a recommendation to the deciding body. For example, if the role is as member of a Parish Council, it may be appropriate for some members of the existing Parish Council to speak in favour of the approved candidate at the election meeting and explain why they think this candidate is the most appropriate.

For some ideas about how to induct the successful candidate to the position, please see our Resource Paper on Board Induction.

3. Review

It is important that the work done through the recruitment process is not lost. In particular, it will be very helpful for the next time recruitment is needed to capture the benefit of the work done previously in stage 2(b) above, reviewing the current position and identifying the needs.

While you may have appointed the perfect candidate who has met all the needs of your governing body on this occasion, this is unlikely. Accordingly, you may want to prepare a policy paper (which could be based on our Board Skills Matrix document) for your organisation with some thoughts on how to develop your governing body over time and review it on a regular basis. For example, you may have identified coming trends where you will need new skills. You may have also identified demographic gaps, eg in gender or cultural background, which cannot be remedied with just one new appointment. Your organisation may feel it is appropriate to recommend guidelines or targets in this regard for the future, for example, it is preferable that within X years we will have Y number of people with Z demographic characteristics.

We would urge care in setting hard and fast targets in this regard. God's plans do not always fit in with our thinking in this regard, and setting strict targets for the process can lead to tokenism or result in the exclusion of a better candidate just to meet the target. Godliness, good character and proven governance skills will usually trump demographic preferences.