



## CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD SERVICE

### **Thank you for your interest in serving on a charter school board!**

Every public charter school functions like an independent school, governed by a board of directors, charged with the oversight of that school. New Orleans has a vital need for talented individuals to volunteer their time, expertise, and passion to serving on charter school boards. As new charter schools open, and as existing boards go through normal transitions, new board members are needed. Boards often need to recruit volunteers with specific skills and experience.

To that end, we at New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) have developed a Board Bank, a pool of potential charter school board members. We provide our Board Bank members with informational opportunities so that they can provide effective service when called upon. Charter school board service is a weighty, yet extremely rewarding, experience—and a tangible way for the citizens of New Orleans to rebuild their communities.

As a member of NSNO's Board Bank:

- You are not committed to anything, and you will not be “assigned” to a charter board.
- You will be invited to attend governance workshops, school visits, and other events.
- Your participation in our events, while not mandatory, will indicate your level of interest and help us get to know you, thereby increasing the likelihood of finding a board that matches your qualifications.
- Your profile may be shared with charter schools in search of someone with your expertise to serve on their board.
- You may be connected with a charter school, if both you and the school are interested in connecting after learning about each other.
- You join a matchmaking process that may take several months; for some members of the Board Bank, no connections result.

### **Who is the ideal charter board member?**

- A seasoned professional who can effectively assume the full responsibility of governing a multi-million dollar enterprise.
- A skilled practitioner of his or her field who will focus on developing a strong board culture and team dynamic to facilitate a healthy rapport among other board members and a constructive partnership with the charter school leader.
- A committed and passionate citizen who believes that all children can learn and deserve an excellent education.

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## CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD SERVICE

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### **What is the time commitment for serving on a charter school board?**

This varies from school to school although best practices tell us that the most effective charter school board members give 6-10 hours a month. This commitment generally breaks down as:

- 2 hours per month for board meetings
- 1-2 hours per month for committee meetings
- 1-2 hours for committee work in between meetings
- 2-4 hours per month for ambassador and fundraising tasks

At a bare minimum you will need to be able to commit to monthly board meetings and at least 2 hours of work in between board meetings. Schools in the start-up, pre-opening phase may require slightly more time. Be sure to ask the board that is recruiting you for an honest assessment of how much time they will need you to give per month.

#### **What skills are charter schools looking for when they seek board members?**

The priority areas are:

- Finance—both accounting and bigger picture financial management skills;
- Real estate—facility identification, negotiation, financing and property management;
- Fundraising—especially cultivating individual donors, building a donor base;
- Public relations/marketing—especially as it relates to fundraising and community building;
- Human resources—personnel policies, salaries, benefits;
- Legal expertise—general law as opposed to educational law;
- Education—especially accountability, systems, and big-picture administration of educational institutions;
- Previous governance experience (non profit or corporate) and strong connections to the community where the school is or will be located are a plus.





## CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD SERVICE

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### **What makes the ideal charter school board member?**

An ideal board member has:

- A deep passion for the school's mission
- Time to commit to this important endeavor
- The ability to bring a concrete skill to the board
- The willingness/ability to serve as a governor, ambassador, sponsor and consultant
- The ability to understand the distinctions between governance and management
- An entrepreneurial spirit, and a comfort with the excitement and uncertainties of starting a brand new organization from scratch
- A level of objectivity – not close personal friends of other board members or the school leader; lack of any personal agenda
- The capability to ask tough questions

#### **I don't have a background in education; can I be an effective board member of a charter school?**

Absolutely! Although an effective charter school board should have some educators on the board (people who really know accountability, have run schools or educational institutions before), the majority of board members should have the skills that the staff of the charter school will never have.

#### **How will I determine which board is right for me?**

- Have an initial meeting with the chair of the board or nominating committee and the school leader
- Learn what they are looking for in new board members and ask tough questions
- If it seems like a fit, set up a second visit to meet additional board members, and the school leader if they are unable to attend the first meeting
- Attend a board meeting to see the board in action
- Clarify what specifically the board will be looking for you to do
- Do some soul searching and make sure you can really give the time that is needed
- Consider serving on a board committee to start, get to know the group better and then join the governing board at a later date





## CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD SERVICE

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### **What does New Schools for New Orleans do for charter school boards?**

We provide extensive training for charter school board members across the city. To date, we have trained and/or placed board members on almost every board of open-enrollment charter schools in New Orleans.

Specifically, for schools launched through NSNO, we offer approximately 60 hours/year of governance training and coaching – all designed to assist each charter board and school leader to build an effective and efficient team that works together to build a high-performing, highly-accountable charter school. We work with each school's board on how to:

- Write bylaws and monitor legal compliance;
- Oversee financial operations/budget compliance;
- Partner with the school leader and instructional staff to ensure academic excellence;
- Host community forums;
- Recruit students; and,
- Develop fundraising strategies.

Moreover, for charter schools citywide, we offer individualized coaching and consultant services to help troubleshoot problems as they arise, and we convene quarterly training for board members around the city to create open forums within which board members from different schools can exchange ideas, discuss challenges, and build a community of charter school board members.

#### **How will I be supported as a board member?**

For NSNO-launched schools, board members will be supported by NSNO and by Meetinghouse Solutions.

For board members citywide, we offer workshops throughout the year for on effective governance practices, and we offer individualized coaching and consultant services in the form of Board Retreats that focus on specific areas of governance, such as the board's role in academic excellence.

We also work closely the state Charter Schools Association to create open forums within which board members from different schools can exchange ideas, discuss challenges, and build a community of charter school board members.





## CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD SERVICE

### Top 10 Characteristics of a Highly Effective Charter School Governing Board

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1. Passionate, unwavering belief in the charter school's mission and core values.
2. Clarity of collective vision – where the school is and where it wants to be in the future.
3. A firm understanding of the charter promises and a clear, consistent way to measure them.
4. Clarity of roles and responsibilities
  - a. Role of the full board
  - b. Role of individual trustees
  - c. Role of committees
  - d. Role of the Executive Director
5. Demonstrated understanding of the difference between governance and management.
6. Focus on results.
7. The right structure
  - a. Board size
  - b. Composition
  - c. Committee structure
  - d. Officers
8. Board meetings focused on strategic questions, not just reporting.
9. An Executive Director who has the time to assist in the creation of effective governance.
10. A strong partnership between the board and the Executive Director, which is built on mutual trust and respect.

### Expectations of a Charter School Board Member

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1. **Governor:** Fulfilling governance functions
2. **Ambassador:** Reaching out to the community
3. **Sponsor:** Giving time and money
4. **Consultant:** Using skills and expertise on behalf of the organization





## CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD SERVICE

### Questions to ask as you determine the best board for you

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#### Organizational:

- When and how was the school founded?
- What are the school's biggest strengths as it moves towards opening? (If a founding charter school board)
- What are the school's biggest challenges and how do they plan to address them?
- How will the board know if the school is successful? How is this measured?

#### Philosophical Alignment:

- What is your vision of a successful school?
- What is the core philosophy driving this school?

#### Skills and Expertise:

- What are the priority skills that you are looking for?
- How will I help fill those gaps?
- How do you plan to fill the other gaps?

#### Board:

- How would you describe the board's culture?
- What are the board's greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
- What is the current board size? What will it be like in 2 years? 5 years?
- Is there a written job description for the board?
- What are the most important accomplishments of your board to date?
- What does it take to be a successful member of this board?
- What are three adjectives you would use to describe this board?
- If you could change one thing about the board what would it be?
- What are the most important things that the board will focus on in the next year?
- What is the nominating process? What are the steps I would have to go through to be considered for your board?

#### Time:

- What is the time commitment required for serving on this board?

#### Information you could request:

- A copy of the school's charter or a summary of the key components
- A job description for the board and individual performance expectations for trustees (if they have it)
- Bios of the current board members

