

High-Impact Service Through Nonprofit Board Involvement



by Alice Korngold, President and Chief Executive Officer and founding director – Business Volunteers Unlimited

Nonprofit executives can play a transformative role in strengthening nonprofits by devoting their precious volunteer hours and business acumen through effective nonprofit board service.

Nonprofits face serious financial and strategic challenges. It is in the interests of our communities for nonprofits to rise to the occasion by making tough decisions about the relevance of their missions, the effectiveness of their programs, optimal revenue structures, and strategic alliances. Sound decision-making is vital in ensuring that our citizens have access to quality health

and human services and education, communities develop effective economic development strategies, and arts and culture thrive.

The responsibility for these important strategic issues rests with nonprofit boards of directors.

Through involvement on nonprofit boards of directors, business executives and professionals can have the greatest possible impact on improving the quality of life in our communities. Business people bring just the right skills to the nonprofit board room, including vision, financial acumen, strategic thinking, advocacy,



Alice Korngold, President and CEO of BVU, teaches a seminar for business executives on "Effective Leadership of Nonprofit Boards".

public relations and communications, and organizational planning and development. In addition to benefiting nonprofits, productive volunteer involvement through nonprofit board service also serves the interests of businesses themselves by developing leadership potential among the companies' executives and fostering good will in the community.

However, CEOs alone cannot and should not carry the full responsibility of board service. While nonprofits reach out to the CEOs who are most visible, there is an enormous pool of untapped talent among the broader legions of middle to higher ranking executives whose names and talents are unknown to nonprofits. Non-CEO executives bring valuable and needed talents to nonprofit boards, too. What is needed is a vehicle to match individuals with certain expertise to specific nonprofits based on a thoughtful match of each candidate's interests and personality to each organization's strategic needs, mission and culture.

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Additionally, it is critical that executives be trained for board service so that their participation is both productive and rewarding. The training helps business people "make the translation:" to apply their business acumen in the unique nonprofit environment. Imagine tens of thousands of business execu-

tives and professionals board-trained and carefully matched with thousands of nonprofits in communities throughout our country. Executive involvement will be transformative in helping nonprofits develop and implement effective revenue strategies, form organizational alliances, focus resources on the most relevant and high impact services, be financially accountable, and measure outcomes. The communities will be better served through strong and viable

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Business Volunteers Unlimited (BVU), a nonprofit organization founded in Cleveland, Ohio in 1993, is being replicated in cities nationwide as a vehicle to train and place business executives on nonprofit boards of directors. Already, BVU has trained and placed over 850 executives on 250 nonprofit boards; 47% of the candidates have risen to board leadership positions, many chairing the boards. BVU assists over 100 businesses annually in engaging in a broad range of productive leadership and volunteer activities, including volunteer management assistance and team volunteering. BVU also provides board and management consulting services to help hundreds of nonprofits raise their level of organizational effectiveness by using the talents volunteered by business people. Most importantly, BVU is governed by corporate leaders, and funded through a highly successful revenue structure.



Alice Korngold and John Bridgeland, Assistant to the President and Director, USA Freedom Corps, address Business Leaders Forum to promote business involvement on nonprofit boards.

Demand from nonprofits for board candidates from businesses is strong. Some might suggest that nonprofits want business people merely for their checkbooks. While board members should be forthcoming in making personal financial contributions, nonprofits recognize that it is in fact the executives' business skills that are valuable in establishing organizational revenue structures to support vital programs and services. For example, a pricing strategist can help an organization analyze and then adjust fees for services in order to generate significant revenues; a communications expert can help an organization convey a compelling case to key constituents, including funders and legislators whose decisions are vital to revenue streams; an organizational development expert can help streamline an organization for cost-effectiveness; an attorney can advise a nonprofit regarding potential strategic alliances. The application of these types of business perspectives can help nonprofits save, sustain, and enhance vital programs and services. BVU has placed several hundred board members who have actually provided these values to nonprofits; many boards are now led by a cadre of business people who have transformed organizations into more viable models using their skills and resources. Such corporate service brings businesses and nonprofits together in a common agenda that can have a tremendous impact on the overall health and vitality of the community.

Now is an extraordinary moment in time when the good will of businesses and the interests of individuals seeking to serve can be directed in ways that transform nonprofit governance and management for the betterment of the community. The most powerful service contribution that businesses can make in strengthening our nation's nonprofit sector is to encourage and facilitate the involvement of their executives on nonprofit boards of directors on a broad scale. The involvement of businesses can help ensure the long-term viability of critical health and human services, educational institutions, civic development initiatives, and cultural organizations. Now is the time to seize a golden opportunity to bring businesses and nonprofits together to improve local, national, and international communities.