

Trustee Insights

VIEWPOINT



Exploring Ways to Reinvent Generational Recruitment

New strategies for engaging and retaining millennial board members

BY ELIZABETH MAZE CLAREY

Health care is experiencing a changing of the guard as a new generation helps reinvent, reorganize and realign the direction of the future of health care. As board members “term out” — through bylaws or retirement — the need for trustee recruitment intensifies. Many boards are looking at a new pool of individuals to recruit from: millennials.

Born between 1981 and 1996, millennials as a generation are

Board Composition and Selection

not strangers to press coverage and headlines about the various industries they have influenced. Health care is no exception to this influence. Younger consumers are demanding more telehealth and on-demand options with an emphasis on well care over sick care. With this generation’s increasing impact on the health care

marketplace, it’s ideal for boards to embrace the idea of welcoming millennials as new trustees.

Encourage Small Steps not Great Leaps

According to [AHA's 2019 National Health Care Governance Survey Report](#), only 2% of voting board members surveyed were 35 years old or younger, while 66% of voting board members were between the ages of 51 and 70. Based on these percentages, it’s apparent that generational diversity in the board room is still a concept rather than an implemented change.

Board service is by no means a small commitment. Those who choose to serve on a board dedicate time, energy and resources to support a hospital’s or health system’s mission while serving as community representatives in the organization’s key decision-making.

While some millennials face barriers to board service, such as work or child care commitments, there are many who would welcome the opportunity to serve as health care trustees. Boards can capture this generation’s passion and interest by encouraging smaller-scale board involvement, especially for first-time participation.

To do so, boards could consider creating additional nonvoting roles or encouraging initial involvement on committees. By introducing millennials to board service in a manage-

able, scalable way, current trustees can educate and mentor generationally diverse board members of tomorrow to take on the future of health care governance.

Be a Mentor not a Lecturer

For many millennials, the need for a mentor can be met through board service. For an existing trustee with both professional and board service acumen, being a mentor can help shape the future of governance and encourage responsible succession planning.

edging the value of the mentor–mentee relationship, it seems intuitive that boards consider adopting a process for orienting and recruiting younger board members. A mentorship program can be designed for new members regardless of prior board experience, to ensure that core governance responsibilities are instilled early in orientation.

Set a Standard not a Limit

Understandably, a high level of professionalism and community involvement is expected of anyone

millennials, these events occurred during their younger years and influenced their view of the future.

Though engaged and ready to provide new insights, these new board members should be thoroughly acquainted with the standards of board service. Setting a standard for new trustees' performance need not be too intensive or overly involved, but rather helpful to millennial board members. It's important to set clear parameters for board participation and be transparent with newer board members about what is expected of them.

Such a performance standard should not become a limitation of board service. For younger trustees, increasing their involvement, and ultimately, serving as board officers, should be a future goal of service as well as an aspirational calling.

Where to Start: Recruitment Platforms

Recruiting millennial board members can seem like a challenge at first glance. However, there are many accessible, already established platforms to assist with recruitment:

- **Social media:** Millennials are particularly active on professional-based social media platforms such as LinkedIn. To address the growing need for boards to be connected with interested candidates, LinkedIn Board Connect serves as a bridge between nonprofit boards and potential candidates.

- **Community involvement:** One recruitment strategy is to look where millennials are already volunteering their time. Looking at the board roster and volunteer network of local, community-based organi-

In the [2019 National Health Care Governance Survey Report](#), 73% of survey respondents indicated they are not taking specific efforts to recruit and engage millennials in board service and governance. With millennials becoming growing consumers and influencers in health care purchasing decisions, engaging them through a board service mentorship is essential in board succession planning.

Current trustees have a wealth of professional and board service experience that is vital to successfully orienting and mentoring future board members. With [71% of Fortune 500 companies](#) acknowl-

willing to take on the responsibility of board service. As health care boards continue to face ever-evolving governance challenges that require adaptive thinking, trustees can harness the innovation that generational diversity brings. This diverse generational experience can foster lively and innovative discussions in the board room as millennials begin their years of board service.

Millennial board members can provide a distinct perspective that comes from their unique lived experiences shaped by formative milestones. Milestone events such as 9/11 and the recession of 2007 were experienced by all ages, but for

zations can be the initial connection needed to recruit. Many millennials are already volunteering their time in the community and looking for the next step in service.

- **Clubs and professional organizations:**

As millennials look to expand their professional networks and skills, membership in clubs such as Rotary and Toastmasters is a way for this generation to refine skills and gain more community involvement experience. Using these local organizations and clubs to source new recruits is a valuable way for boards to find highly motivated and purpose-driven millennials who would make ideal board candidates.

- **Graduate programs:**

To gain a professional edge, many millennials are pursuing higher education. Working directly with graduate school advisors and faculty is a potential source of recruitment. Many graduate students are actively working in health-related fields and looking to gain more experience.

TRUSTEE TAKEAWAYS

- Diversity in age — and subsequently, thought — is essential to the success of a board.
- Looking to a new pool of individuals for recruitment is a way for boards to reinvigorate and reenergize board composition.
- Small steps are essential steps. Starting with a mentor–mentee relationship is a way to gradually introduce younger professionals to board service.
- Using committees to segue into board involvement can offer less experienced trustees a way to learn the basics of board service.
- Orientation is key. Thorough onboarding will prepare all new trustees — regardless of generational differences — for successful board service.
- Don't shy away from advice. Serving as a mentor to millennial board members who are hoping to represent their community in a new, meaningful way is a welcomed relationship.

A generationally diverse board can be an asset to any health care organization. Encouraging and embracing millennial participation on health care boards allow for responsible succession planning, new perspectives and diversity in board culture. Though expanding the new recruitment pool can be over-

whelming, boards can harness this opportunity for strategic growth and innovation in the board room.

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