

Three Strategies for Better Boards

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Outline for the session

- See the results of unintentional board recruitment
- Consider how to strengthen governance through **clarity**
- Learn about strategies and resources to bring home



The background of the image is a dark teal color with a pattern of white, wavy, topographic-style contour lines. Some lines are solid, while others are dashed, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lines flow across the top half of the image.

Who is ready for an adventure?

Happy Valley Land Trust



The background features a dark teal color with a pattern of white, wavy, topographic-style lines. Some lines are solid, while others are dashed, creating a sense of depth and movement.

Meet the executive director

The Executive Director

- Nancy
- 1 year in the role
- Prior experience as a land protection specialist
- Early stage of career, smart, gets it
- Grew up in town, understands people and culture
- Frustration is growing with her current board and doesn't know what to do about it



Meet our board members

The Kindly Supporter

Ginny Harrington, 76 years old

- Length of Service: 18 years
- Profession: Retired Biology teacher
- Mission Alignment: Understands mission. Loves nature; has led hikes for 10 years. Serves on local open space committee.
- Financial Support: Gives modest annual gift; intends to bequeath 50% of her estate to Trust.
- Personality: Introverted; quiet at meetings. Very agreeable and does not challenge the status quo or provide much by way of thoughtful guidance or advice.
- Other: Kind and blindly supportive the board chair. Limited social and business relationships that add value to her board service.

The Interrupter

Emily Reed, 50 years old

- Length of Service: 1 year
- Profession: Self-employed financial planner
- Mission Alignment: New to the board and her understanding of the mission is emerging.
- Financial Support: Gives modest annual gift. Enthusiastically agreed to host the annual fundraising event.
- Personality: Talks a lot; tendency to interrupt; can be argumentative; very social.
- Other: Fundamentally struggles with the concept of managing to a mission and still sees the bottom line of the budget as foremost indicator of success.

The Impresser

Antonio Rhodes, 42 years old

- Length of Service: 3 months
- Profession: Land-use attorney
- Mission Alignment: Appreciates mission but works for developers. Thinks perhaps there is too much conserved land already.
- Financial Support: Does not give money; believes his board service is enough of a gift to HVLT.
- Personality: Cooperative disposition; wants to contribute; new to board; trying to find his way.
- Other: Wonders how HVLT can generate revenue from lands. Likes to impress others with his knowledge.

The Meddler

Greg Kane, 47 years old

- Length of Service: 1 year
- Profession: Just sold tech start-up for lots of money; no longer working
- Mission Alignment: Likes to hunt, fish, hike with kids; understands importance of protecting land; lives in gated community.
- Financial Support: Gave a generous gift last year but restricted it to stewardship of land around his development.
- Personality: High energy & confidence; lots of time on his hands; loves to suggest ideas and be the smartest person at the table.
- Other: Wants to do social media and marketing for HVLT; very vocal about staff shortcomings; wants to be involved in operations; does not understand that operations are the responsibility of the ED.

The Talker

Stacey Ames, 38 years old

- Length of Service: 2 years
- Profession: Owns local bookshop.
- Mission Alignment: Afraid of bugs; does not spend much time in nature. Cares about the community but not passionate about land protection.
- Financial Support: Gives a generous gift and is willing to help fundraise.
- Personality: Talks a lot; does not listen well; very social; knows many people in the community. No interest in the finances; does not understand the reports given to the board.
- Other: Often misses meetings or must leave early to get home to family.

The Sleeper

Serena Thompson, 82 years old

- Length of Service: 24 years
- Profession: Owns family horse farm that has been in family for 3 generations.
- Mission Alignment: Family is one of largest landowners in the community; gave HVLT its first piece of land. Family sold 10,000 acres to developer.
- Financial Support: Biggest annual donor. Intends to leave significant bequest.
- Personality: Very polite, agreeable, and gracious; does not rock the boat.
- Other: Does not review board packet; often falls asleep during the meeting.

The Blabber

Doug Walters, 55 years old

- Length of Service: 2 years
- Profession: Realtor
- Mission Alignment: Not passionate about land protection but appreciates it because he understands the connection between open lands and high real estate values. Thinks new developments are beautiful.
- Financial Support: Gives modest annual gift, but only if asked.
- Personality: Shares information from board meetings in the real estate community. Lacks discretion and does not honor confidentiality required of board members.
- Other: Is helpful to the staff on real estate transactions. Knows many landowners..

The Pleaser

Jack Grady, Board Chair, 78 years old

- Length of Service: 17 years (Chair for 12)
- Profession: Retired middle school teacher
- Mission Alignment: Understands mission well and is passionate.
- Financial Support: Gives a generous annual gift but will not help with fundraising.
- Personality: Believes in importance of consensus. Is affable. He is liked but not necessarily respected by many on the board.
- Other: Not a strong leader, can be naïve. Spends a lot of time in the weeds on issues of little consequence. Has trouble controlling the meeting and allows side conversations and interruptions.

Board Meeting Agenda

- 1. Approval of Minutes from January Meeting**
- 2. Chairman's Report**
 - **New Lights in HQ Parking Lot**
 - **Book Donations to the HVLT Library**
- 3. Fin Com Report**
 - **Audit Management Letter**
- 4. Land Protection Project**
 - **Sunnyside Farm**
- 5. ED's Report**
 - **Helicopter Pad in Easement**
 - **Fundraising**
- 6. Other Business**
 - **Social media**

Strategy #1: Clarify who/what you need

- Consider your organization's strategic goals
- Ensure board remains strategic and balanced
- Consider values and approach for strong culture fit



Alice sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table

Strategy #1: Clarify who/what you need

- Visually outline competencies, demographics and connections
- Identify gaps to address



Board Profile Matrix

Developed by Judy Anderson and Donna Erickson

Board Profile Matrix		Name	Name
Skills and Knowledge			
Accounting			
Advertising/Marketing			
Banking/Finance			
Board Experience			
Conservation Biology/Ecology			
Fundraising and Development			
Governmental Relations			
Journalism/Writing/Editing			
Landowner Relations/Issues			
Legal			
Land Conservation			
Media/Entertainment			
Strategic Planning			
Nonprofit Management			
Public Relations/Communications			
Real Estate			
Volunteer Organizing			
Wildlife Biology			
Farming			
Contacts and Influence			
Philanthropists/Major Donors			
Business Community			
Media			
Government Agencies			
Ethnic/Minority Groups			
Conservation Organizations			
Landowners			
Native American Tribes			

Board Profile Matrix

- landtrustalliance.org/resources/learn/explore/template-for-practice-3b-board-profile-matrix#content

Agricultural community/associations		
Schools		
Service organizations		
LGBTQ Community		
Values/Organizational Styles		
Team--player		
Listener		
Leader		
Follows through on commitments		
Policy orientated		
Congenial/Fun		
Articulate, public speaking		
Calculatedr risk-taker		
Self-motivated		
Demographics		
Male		
Female		
Transgender		
Under 40 Years		
40-49 Years		
50-59 Years		
60+ Years		
Geographic Location - (urban/rural)		
Geographic Location - (state)		

Other Examples: Board Profile Matrix

Board Member Names	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
Skills & Knowledge					
Land trust conservation methods & techniques					
Forest management					
Wildlife management/ecological communities					
Wetlands protection					
Water resources – lakes, rivers, streams					
Legal – conservation & organization					
Financial planning for estate and other taxes					
Finance/investment management					
Real estate transactions					
Volunteer development & management					
Public presentation skills					
Communications – media, public relations					
Marketing					
Publications – newsletter, brochures, graphics					
Land trust/non-profit governance					
Strategic planning					
Leadership development					
Fundraising - membership development					
Fundraising - major donors					
Fundraising – corporations & foundations					
Grant writing					
Organizational alliances, partnerships					
Board development – experience w/ other boards					
Human resources/personnel					
Accounting/bookkeeping/budgeting					
Risk management/insurance					

Board Names:														
Contacts & Influence														
Press – Service area, statewide														
Prominent/priority private land owners														
Prominent donors – individual, corp, foundation														
Real estate industry														
Agriculture, forestry, or mining industry														
Other conservation organizations														
Elected government officials – local, county, state, tribal, federal														
Government agencies – local, county, state, tribal, federal														
Demographics														
County X														
County Y														
County Z														
City A														
Village B														
Village C														
City D														
Year-round resident														
Seasonal resident														
Non-resident with relevant perspectives/experiences														
Male														
Female														
Nonbinary														
Age 18-25														
Age 25-34														
Age 35-54														
Age 55-70														
Age 70 or older														
White/Caucasian														
Hispanic														
Black														
Asian														
Indigenous/Native American														

The background features a dark teal color with a pattern of light-colored, wavy lines. The top portion of the image contains a topographic map-style pattern with solid and dashed contour lines. The text "Applying the matrix" is centered in the lower half of the image.

Applying the matrix

Identifying gaps

Be clear about who you need at the table

- It is easier to find it when you know what you need.
- What's well represented?
- What's missing?

Identifying gaps

Be clear about who you need at the table

- How might you find new board members that fill the gaps?
- Where might you look?
- How do you know if it will be a good fit?
 - Spend time getting to know people
 - Meet with potential board members
 - Ask your network
 - Low risk ways to test the fit (e.g. volunteer committee member)

Does your board reflect the community you work in?

- How might your organization be enhanced by board members with expertise from other sectors or lived experiences?
- Where can you find board members with different lived experiences, perspectives and expertise?
- How might you lower barriers to participation?



Is your board culture ready to welcome new perspectives?

- Engage internal board champions to collaboratively assess strengths and opportunities for growth
- Prioritize training to build skills and awareness (e.g. DEI Framework and Resources for Change)
- Consider committee participation or a junior board as an on-ramp to board member status



Strategy #2: Clarify roles and expectations

Be clear about what you expect

- Develop a board service agreement
- Sets clear expectations about responsibilities and commitments, making the role more approachable and transparent.
- Reinforces accountability by serving as a shared agreement on what is required to fulfill roles effectively.
- For smaller organizations that rely on board members for day-to-day operations: articulate volunteer tasks separately from board agreement

Sample Board Member Commitment Letter
For an All-Volunteer Organization
Using RASIC Language

As a volunteer, I agree to prioritize the following by the board:

Member Name: _____
Date: _____

As a board member, I agree and commit to performing the governance roles the board as a body has responsibility and authority for, including:

My responsibilities will follow:


1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Bo

- Fostering a healthy and positive organizational culture.
- Establishing the organization's strategic plan, including the mission, vision, values, areas of focus, operational and programmatic goals, and a resourcing plan.
- Honoring the board's role and respecting roles the board has delegated to board committees, volunteers, and contractors in managing operations and specific tasks and activities.
- Overseeing the organization's finances and approving and monitoring the budget.
- Approving role descriptions for key management roles led by volunteers (e.g., communications/marketing lead, membership/events lead, stewardship/asset/property management lead, project management lead, accounting lead, fundraising lead, volunteer coordination lead, etc.).
- Approving role descriptions and supervising, evaluating, and approving compensation for paid contractor(s).
- Fostering a culture that embraces learning through impact-focused evaluation of goals and targets set in the strategic plan.
- Fostering board leadership and growth, including board recruitment.
- Participating in leadership succession processes (both emergency and planned).
- Serving on a board committee.

I have read and agree to all the commitments and responsibilities outlined in my Board Manual and further, I agree to:

- Actively review 100% of all meeting materials to remain knowledgeable about the organization and its operations.
- Act as a positive ambassador for the organization and its goals and decisions.
- Respond within ____ hours of receiving an email or phone call from a fellow board member, staff, or volunteer.
 - I prefer to communicate by ____ (email, phone, text, other).

 PARALLEL SOLUTIONS

Sample Board Member Commitment Letter For an All-Volunteer Organization

Using RASIC Language

Member Name: _____

Date: _____

As a board member, I agree and commit to performing the governance roles the board as a body has responsibility and authority for, including:

- Fostering a healthy and positive organizational culture.
- Establishing the organization's strategic plan, including the mission, vision, values, areas of focus, operational and programmatic goals, and a resourcing plan.
- Honoring the board's role and respecting roles the board has delegated to board committees, volunteers, and contractors in managing operations and specific tasks and activities.
- Overseeing the organization's finances and approving and monitoring the budget.
- Approving role descriptions for key management roles led by volunteers (e.g., communications/marketing lead, membership/events lead, stewardship/asset/property management lead, project management lead, accounting lead, fundraising lead, volunteer coordination lead, etc.).
- Approving role descriptions and supervising, evaluating, and approving compensation for paid contractor(s).
- Fostering a culture that embraces learning through impact-focused evaluation of goals and targets set in the strategic plan.
- Fostering board leadership and growth, including board recruitment.
- Participating in leadership succession processes (both emergency and planned).
- Serving on a board committee.

I have read and agree to all the commitments and responsibilities outlined in my Board Manual and further, I agree to:

- Actively review 100% of all meeting materials to remain knowledgeable about the organization and its operations.
- Act as a positive ambassador for the organization and its goals and decisions.
- Respond within ____ hours of receiving an email or phone call from a fellow board member, staff, or volunteer.
 - I prefer to communicate by _____ (email, phone, text, other).



- Email:
- Phone number:
- Mailing Address:

As a volunteer, I am also willing to be assigned responsibility for tasks that have been prioritized through the strategic plan and/or annual work plans developed and authorized by the board. These activities include:

My support of the organization's financial sustainability will be demonstrated by the following actions. I will:

1. Make a gift by December of this year that's commensurate with my financial ability and comfort.
2. Personalize solicitations for donation letters.
3. Make thank you calls and/or write thank you notes to existing donors, members, or volunteers.
4. Act as a community-based ambassador, championing the organization's mission and work.
5. Attend community outreach and relationship-building events hosted by the organization.
6. Other:

Board Member Signature: _____



Wildlands Trust Board Member Selection Criteria

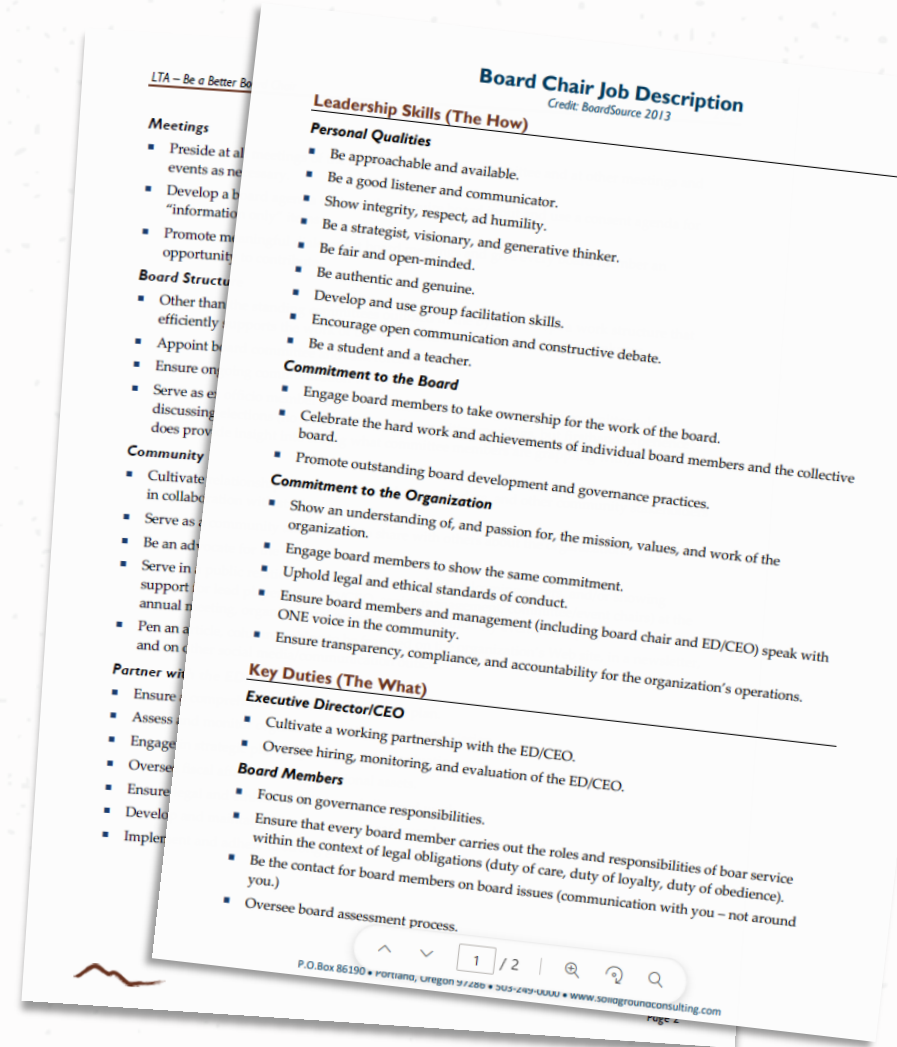
Since 1973, the Wildlands Trust has been served by committed board members who dedicate their time and resources to promote land conservation and its role in shaping our region. We select board prospects based upon their commitment to our mission as well as their ability to bring knowledge and professional skills to our work. We encourage all board members to provide philanthropic support, but an individual's ability to give significantly is not a pre-determinant for board membership. Below are some of the criteria we apply when considering candidates for the Wildlands Trust board:

- Solid alignment with our land conservation mission and an interest in learning more about how land protection works.
- Willingness and ability to serve as a Wildlands ambassador in the community.
- Commitment to support the mission financially, given the ability to do so.
- Awareness, or willingness to learn non-profit business and operational principles and how these differ from for-profit principles.
- Professional skills and valuable expertise to the organization (legal, natural resource, engineering, farming, business, finance, insurance, investment, fundraising, volunteerism).
- Diverse regional geographic representation.
- Willingness to attend 5 meetings per year, serve on a sub-committee, and assist the organization with special projects related to professional skill set or interests.

Strategy #2: Clarify roles and expectations

Utilize Job Descriptions for Key Board Positions

- Essential for operational efficiency, transparency, succession
- Clarify scope – help members understand contributions, reduce risk of key tasks being overlooked



Board Chair Job Description

Credit: BoardSource 2013

Leadership Skills (The How)

Personal Qualities

- Be approachable and available.
- Be a good listener and communicator.
- Show integrity, respect, and humility.
- Be a strategist, visionary, and generative thinker.
- Be fair and open-minded.
- Be authentic and genuine.
- Develop and use group facilitation skills.
- Encourage open communication and constructive debate.
- Be a student and a teacher.

Commitment to the Board

- Engage board members to take ownership for the work of the board.
- Celebrate the hard work and achievements of individual board members and the collective board.
- Promote outstanding board development and governance practices.

Commitment to the Organization

- Show an understanding of, and passion for, the mission, values, and work of the organization.
- Engage board members to show the same commitment.
- Uphold legal and ethical standards of conduct.
- Ensure board members and management (including board chair and ED/CEO) speak with ONE voice in the community.
- Ensure transparency, compliance, and accountability for the organization's operations.

Key Duties (The What)

Executive Director/CEO

- Cultivate a working partnership with the ED/CEO.
- Oversee hiring, monitoring, and evaluation of the ED/CEO.

Board Members

- Focus on governance responsibilities.
- Ensure that every board member carries out the roles and responsibilities of board service within the context of legal obligations (duty of care, duty of loyalty, duty of obedience).
- Be the contact for board members on board issues (communication with you – not around you.)
- Oversee board assessment process.

Meetings

- Preside at all meetings of the board and executive committee and at other meetings and events as necessary.
- Develop a board agenda of items that require board input and use a consent agenda for “information only” items.
- Promote meaningful dialogue at board meetings and give every board member an opportunity to contribute.

Board Structure

- Other than the standing committees outlined in the bylaws, adopt a work structure that efficiently supports the work of the board and ensures communication linkages.
- Appoint board committee and task force chairs.
- Ensure ongoing communication with the board.
- Serve as ex officio member of all committees except the governance committee when discussing elections (no need to attend all committee meetings, but firsthand experience does provide insight into seeing what committee members are grappling with).

Community

- Cultivate relationships with individual donors, funders, and other community stakeholders in collaboration with staff.
- Serve as a community ambassador to share with others about the organization.
- Be an advocate for the organization.
- Serve in a public relations role by giving speeches, welcoming others, and/or showing support for lead players (e.g. ED/CEO, senior management, committee/event chairs) at the annual meeting, organizational programs, and community events as appropriate.
- Pen an article, column, or blog to be featured on the organization's Web site, in a newsletter, and on other social media/communication outlets.

Partner with the ED/CEO and Board Members

- Ensure a comprehensive board development plan.
- Assess and monitor organizational alignment with mission.
- Engage in strategic planning and program evaluation.
- Oversee fiscal affairs and organizational assets.
- Ensure legal and ethical compliance of all board work.
- Develop and maintain risk management safeguards.
- Implement and adhere to strong governance practices.



Strategy # 3: Set them up for success

- Provide a formal orientation to ground them in the land trust's business
- Help them understand the mission, land conservation context, and their responsibilities
- Use an onboarding checklist and board manual (portal: bylaws, minutes, policies, committees)
- Host orientation training
- Consider mentorship

The screenshot shows the Wildlands Trust Board of Directors website. The browser address bar is wildlandstrust.org/board-home. The page title is "Wildlands Trust Board of Directors".

Upcoming Board Meetings
All Board meetings are at 5:30PM in the Barn unless stated otherwise.
Thursday January 30, 2025
Thursday April 24, 2025
Thursday July 24, 2025
We reserve the option to have a 5th meeting via Zoom if needed at any point in the year.

Meeting Documents
January 30, 2025
Download

Board Member Contact Information
Atterbury, Marilynn
1023 Long Pond Rd, Plymouth, MA 02360

Lands Committee
Jan 21, 2025 Site Visit
Lands Committee

Board Committees
2024 - 2025
Please contact Karen Grey if you have questions on committee assignments.

Executive Committee
(Staff Liaison: Karen Grey)
Sam Chapin (Chair)
Scott Ford (Vice Chair)
Pat Loring (Chair Appointee)
Greg Lucini (Treasurer)
Deborah Sedares (Secretary)
Mark Russo (Chair Appointee)

Finance & Audit Committee
(Staff Liaison: Karen Grey)
Greg Lucini (Chair)
Mark Russo

Lands Committee
(Staff Liaison: Scott MacFaden)
Phil Benjamin (non-board)
Brian Harrington (Chair)
John Hornstra
Patricia Loring
Ellen Milt (Non-board)
Wayne Petersen (Vice Chair)
Mark Russo

Stewardship Committee
(Staff liaisons: Zoe Smiarowski & Owen Grey)

Resources
Policies +
Financials +
Archived Meeting Minutes +

Site Visit - Tues., Jan. 21, 2025 +
Site Visit - Tues., Oct 8, 2024 +
Site Visit - Mon., July 1, 2024 +
Site Visit - Tues., Apr. 9, 2024 +

Resources for You

Board Matrix

- [Board Profile Template](#) – Judy Anderson and Donna Erikson

Board Service Agreements

- [Board Commitment Letter – All Volunteer Land Trusts](#) - Parallel Solutions
- [Board Commitment Letter – Staffed Land Trusts](#) - Parallel Solutions
- [Board Job Description](#) - Development for Conservation

Job Descriptions

- [Board Chair Roles and Responsibilities](#) – Board Source

Onboarding Materials

- [Introduction to Land Trust Work for New Board Members](#) – Land Trust Alliance Webinar with Connie Manes
- [Learning Path for Board Members](#) – A guided journey through Alliance resource specifically for board members
- [Board Member Orientation Checklist](#) – Board Source

Resources for You

Recruiting for board diversity

- [Leading with Intent](#) – Board Source
- [Recruiting for Board Diversity with Respect](#) – Board Source
- [Green Leadership Trust](#)

Webinars and recordings

- [Reenergizing Your Board](#)
- How to Be a Great Treasurer (upcoming May 2025)
- [How to Be a Great Board Chair](#)
- [Engaging Your Board in Fundraising](#)



Thank you!

Jen Plowden

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Land Trust Alliance

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Wildlands Trust

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