



MICHIGAN MAIN STREET

CASE STUDY: BOARD RECRUITMENT STRATEGY IN ADRIAN

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Adrian Main Street has created a board member recruitment process that has resulted in a highly-effective and engaged board. Their process involves a strategic dual-avenue approach that combines recommendations from current board members with an open recruitment process through the municipality. They include thorough screening, structured interviews, and a comprehensive onboarding system to ensure that selected members align with the program's vision and goals. The aim is to cultivate a board that is engaged, knowledgeable, and capable of driving the program forward.

The recruitment for board members involves both recommendations from current board members and an open recruitment process through the municipality. Candidates submit a printed application, which is reviewed for suitability. The director then discusses the board's functions, time commitment (20-30 hours per week), and the role's public implications with each candidate.



The director does not make recommendations. Instead, an interview committee, including the executive committee and the mayor, conducts interviews using standardized questions. The committee aims to find candidates motivated by vision and goals, rather than personal agendas. The committee chair emphasizes transparency, noting that all activities may be public records under FOIA.

Following the interviews, the committee recommends candidates to the mayor, who presents them to the city council for formal appointment. New board members then undergo an onboarding process with the director, selecting a committee and scheduling follow-up meetings for six months and one year later to ensure effective contributions.

KEY SUCCESSES

Goal-oriented candidate selection: The structured interview process helps identify candidates with a genuine vision and goals, rather than personal agendas.

Streamlined Onboarding: Formalizing the onboarding process has transformed board meetings from chaotic to efficient, with meeting times reduced significantly.

Strong Relationships are Key: Establishing strong relationships between the director and individual board members has enhanced understanding of priorities and improved board dynamics.

Ongoing Education: The board's commitment to ongoing education and engagement has led to a more focused and effective governance structure, positioning the program for long-term success.

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The interview process and initial conversations with potential board members are designed not to intimidate, but to clearly communicate the commitment required for the role. This approach ensures that candidates are fully aware of the responsibilities and time demands they will face. The director also encourages current board members to hold him accountable, which requires them to actively engage and assert their perspectives within the board's activities.

PROJECT FUNDING

The DDA's training budget is usually taken up by education and conferences expenses for the director and board members.

The director is currently in conversation with the board chair to develop board retreat, which will necessitate funding.



CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

- Ensuring compliance with city charter requirements, while also navigating exemptions for vested interests in the downtown district.
- Transitioning from a previously informal onboarding process, which led to a chaotic board environment, to a more structured and effective approach.
- Addressing the lack of experience among board members, which requires significant coaching and education to build their effectiveness.

By streamlining the recruitment process and setting clear expectations, the board has achieved significantly more efficient meetings, reducing what used to be 1-2 hour sessions down to about 30 minutes. The director makes it a priority to build strong relationships with individual board members to better understand their priorities and ensure that everyone is aligned. Recognizing his role as the navigator of the board, the director does not wait for members to direct him; instead, he proactively assigns tasks and responsibilities to keep board members engaged and drive the organization's mission forward.

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