

Tips for aspirant non-executive directors

We are often asked by aspirant non-executive directors for advice as to how they can best position themselves for board roles. In this document, we've captured some of our key 'tips' as well as other information which might be useful to those seeking board roles.

How to be ready and promote yourself for board positions?

1. **Be good at your day job:** Your executive career is where you will develop the skills, experience and reputation which will assist you in your board career.
2. **Define your value proposition as a director:** Prepare a clearly articulated and concise statement (or 'elevator pitch') about your career experience, skills and attribute and how you can add value to a board.
3. **Have clear motivations:** Knowing why you want to be a director, the type of board role you are seeking, and having the time to commit to the role is critical.
4. **Undertake professional development in governance and/or directorship:** Professional associations and higher learning institutions such as the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) and the Governance Institute of Australia (GIA) provide both training and opportunities to network with directors.
5. **Prepare a directors' resume:** A directors' resume is different to an executive resume in that it focuses on skills relevant to a board's role. Even if you don't have board experience, translate your skills and experience to what the role of a board entails - you might include your experience in directly reporting to a board, being involved in a board committee, community organisation committee or being on the board of a subsidiary entity or JV within your corporate group. For more detail you can access our director resume template [here](#).
6. **Network and make contacts at board level:** Tell relevant people about your desire to sit on a board. If there are particular boards you aspire to join, get to know those companies and their directors (without 'over-pitching' yourself).
7. **Seek board level experience:** Some directors start their board careers by sitting on a not-for-profit board where skilled directors are often sought. Here you can gain board experience while contributing to the work of a worthwhile cause. However, ensure that you have a passion for the organisation's objectives – not-for-profits can involve a lot of work for no or little remuneration and you need to be mindful of your liability as a director.
8. **Find mentors and sponsors:** Informal and formal mentoring by experienced directors can provide an invaluable source of introductions as well as trusted advice, for example, as a sounding board for your directors' resume, providing background on a board and its directors, and helping you run through a board level interview.

9. Prepare your own 'board strategic plan': If you are serious about pursuing a board career, think about the ideal mix of boards you want (e.g. listed, private, or not-for-profit) and in what industries or sectors. It might also be useful to identify six to ten boards that you are interested in and specifically set out to engage with, and meet people on, those boards where appropriate opportunities arise.
10. Be passionate about the company's purpose: Companies look for directors who are passionate about the company's purpose and its success. Think about how aligned you are to that purpose and how you can contribute to the board.

What to consider when applying for a board role

If you are applying for a specific role:

- > read the selection criteria thoroughly and be sure that you meet the requirements for skills and experience – applying for roles indiscriminately doesn't reflect that you have good judgment or that you have a real interest in the particular company
- > check there are no impediments to taking on the position such as conflicts of interest, and executive contract restrictions
- > research the role and tailor your resume to the skills sought and the company whose board you are seeking to join, and
- > be clear about the time commitment and other expectations of the role and ensure that you are able to meet them.

Actively listen to what the board is seeking: 'Selling yourself' doesn't equate to talking about yourself, what you've done and how you would change the board and company if appointed. It involves listening to what the company is looking for and being clear about where you can contribute at board level.

Undertake a good due diligence process before you take on a board role. As a director you have legal duties and take on certain liabilities. As far as possible, you need to make sure that you are comfortable with the company and board.

Preparing your director's resume and cover letter

When applying for a board role, a director's resume and cover letter are essential - and it is not the same as an executive resume.

A director's resume should be two pages (no more than three) and focus on your skills and experience relevant to a board. Even if you don't have board experience, you should relate your skills and experience to the functions of a board or refer to your 'board-related experience' which might include directly reporting to a board, being involved in a board committee or being on the board of a subsidiary entity within your corporate group.

You should tailor your director's resume for each role to the skills sought and the target company.

The purpose of a directors' resume is to get you on the 'long list' for a role. If you are successful in doing this, then a recruiter or the company will come back and seek more detail from you.

Your resume should be accompanied by a cover letter. Your cover letter should be short and punchy (definitely no more than two pages and preferably a page) highlighting the reason for your interest in the role, your fit to the selection criteria, and summarising your relevant skills and experience. Bullet points rather than lengthy prose in small font to ensure the letter fits on one page, is a lot easier to read.

Before writing the cover letter you should read the selection criteria thoroughly, and research the company if you are not familiar with it.

A template for a directors' resume and cover letter can be downloaded from our [website](#). These templates are designed to be a guide as they should reflect your own style.

Getting your first board role

The first questions any aspiring director should ask themselves is why do they want to be on a board and what sort of board do they want to be on?

Companies and organisations in a wide range of sectors have boards: ASX listed companies, private companies, private companies (including SMEs), family businesses, APRA regulated financial institutions (such as banks, general and health insurers), superannuation companies, government owned entities and not-for-profit organisations ranging from large, complex charities through to management committees of local community organisations.

When assessing prospective directors, boards carefully assess not only the 'skills gap' they are seeking to fill but also the personal attributes or 'fit' of a director.

Some directors start their board careers by sitting on a not-for-profit board where skilled executives are often sought after. This enables a new director to gain board experience as well as contribute to the work of the organisation. However, others transition directly into a commercial board role utilising their strong professional or industry skills.

Traditionally, directors have been recruited through word of mouth and networks. Increasingly, boards are using more open and objective processes to draw in a diverse pool of suitably skilled candidates. A wide range of recruitment companies recruit directors for boards. Some of these firms enable you to register your resume on their director database through their website.

Not all board roles are advertised, so maintaining strong networks will help you hear about those roles that are discreetly in market.

There are various director 'job boards' and websites where director vacancies are advertised. Some of these 'job boards' include:

- > Australian Institute of Company Directors '[Directorship Opportunities](#)'
- > [Women on Boards](#)
- > [Institute of Community Directors](#) matching service
- > Pro Bono Australia '[Volunteer Match](#)'

The state and federal governments have registers for people interested in joining government boards. The various state registers are as follows:

- > [ACT](#)
- > [Northern Territory](#)
- > [NSW](#)
- > [Queensland](#)
- > [South Australia](#)
- > [Tasmania](#)
- > [Victoria](#)
- > [Western Australia](#)

For Federal Government boards:

- > The Australian Government's Treasury Department maintains an active [database](#) for those interested in being considered for appointed to boards within the Treasury portfolio.
- > The [Board:Links](#) database connects Australia's industry leading women with opportunities to be considered for Australian Government board appointments.

In addition, there are some specific industry and sector-based job boards.

Sport Australia has established a [National Sports Directorship Register](#) open to anyone interested in becoming a director of a sporting entity.

Directors Australia directors' database

For us to consider you for board roles, you are welcome to [register](#) on our directors' database. We use our database as a key reference source when filling board roles. On registering you will also see our privacy policy.

It would be useful for you to reflect on our tips prior to submitting your resume and make sure to review our [privacy policy](#).

Please note, we do not provide your resumes to clients without your consent.

Directors Australia delivers organisations the right people, insights, and strategies to govern effectively. We do this through experienced board and governance advisory services and specialist non-executive director recruitment. We recruit exclusively for boards, board committees and advisory councils.

**Incredible people shape great organisations.
Great organisations have good governance.**

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Be sure to check out our website for upcoming events and webinars.