Getting on Board: Are Board Placement Services Right for You?

Career Development

The recent hype about board service, especially for women and diverse candidates, is real. It seems like everyone is getting on board — or at least trying to. The increased interest in board service has led to a proliferation of board placement and board readiness services. These services offer

appealing packages, intended to help potential board members become desirable candidates and find the positions of their dreams. Many seem like the “magic ticket” to a professional’s first board position.

As outspoken advocates for diverse boards, we get many questions about these services. Are they useful? How much do they cost? How should a hopeful board candidate choose from the many options? As much as we like to advise and encourage potential board candidates, we can never really answer these questions. They’re just too subjective! Choosing a board placement or board readiness service is like choosing a car: the right one depends completely on you, your goals, and your preferences. It isn’t an easy process, but by asking the right questions, you can get a feel for whether a specific placement or readiness service is right for you.

Not sure where to start? Here’s our list of questions to ask any board placement or board readiness services:

Geographic concerns

Where are the services offered? Where are the candidates placed? Does the service offer board placement or readiness services locally, nationally, and internationally? At a minimum, you want to make sure that the board placement or board readiness service meets at least some of your geographic needs and aspirations.

Industry and network fit

Does the service offer boards serving in a wide variety of interest areas to address your goals? Does the service have connections in your industry? Does it place people in public, private, startup, or nonprofit boards that you are interested in? Does it have connections and trusted relationships with the executives, decision-makers, and influencers? It is important to ensure that the service’s expertise, core competency, and network are of use to you.

Track record of success

Does the service track its success metrics? How often does it place candidates? How frequently do the candidates it places work long term? Do its candidates tend to stay on boards where they are placed for at least three years? Does it publish its rates online? If not, why not? Does the service track how its candidates have performed once recruited for a board? Does the service provide a relatively comprehensive list of companies it has helped? How long has the service been in existence?

Process logistics

If a service considers itself a board matching service, how many board positions does it offer each month or year? How many organizations does it serve regularly? Does it let you interview with more than one board opening at a time? It is also important to understand what, exactly, you are signing up for. How exactly does the algorithm or process work? How involved is the service, beyond simply identifying candidates? Is there someone at the service who will personally understand the company, their needs, and their experiences and then match you with the right board opportunity? Or, will you be invited to a board fair, or provided with a list or search engine to peruse board opportunities on your own? How does the service ensure quality control for matches? Finally, what are the credentials

of the individuals who will be performing your search?

Money matters

Who will pay for placing you, how much, and when? Will the company pay? Are you expected to pay? Is the payment tied to reaching any milestones? Are there different packages for different candidates or companies?

Included and additional services

Does the service provide any other assistance, such as writing your board bio? Does it provide basic director training or interview coaching? Does it share research about the company, its executives, and its board members? Does the service stay involved throughout the matching process to answer questions and keep the interview process on track? What other value besides matching does the service provide? Is board matching the primary product this service offers, or do they offer other services such as executive placement, training, or coaching?

Good to know

You may also want to understand whether the board specializes in certain demographics such as hiring initiatives for women, placing diverse candidates, or locating first-time board candidates. You may also need to know whether the service will allow you to work with other board placement or board readiness services simultaneously.

This list may seem overwhelming, but because board service is such an important career step, every question is important. After all, you wouldn’t purchase a car without making sure all your bases were covered. Similarly, when choosing the right vehicle for this exciting career move, you need to shop smart and stay proactive to separate out the lemons. Soon enough, you’ll be well on your way to getting on board.

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Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat, Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities. She is working on her next books: Visual IQ for Lawyers (ABA 2024), The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle (Globe Law and Business 2024), and Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data (Globe Law and Business 2024).

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