



## **Volunteerism: Why I Serve: The rewards and challenges of nonprofit board service**

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When I was twenty four, I discovered Breast Cancer Action, a national health justice nonprofit based in San Francisco. My mom was recently diagnosed with breast cancer, and [BCAction](#) helped me through the fear and pointed me to their invaluable resources. A year later, I was ready to give back and joined as the youngest member of their board of directors, not knowing exactly what that entailed.

Since then, I've served on four nonprofit boards and am currently the board president for [Community Beyond Violence](#) (CBV), the leading local agency dedicated to supporting those affected by interpersonal violence and sexual assault.

### **What I've learned**

I joined [BCAction](#), [CBV](#), and others because I cared about the issues, but I have stayed in board service because of the meaning it brings into my life.

A board role is different from purely volunteering or working for an organization. It is time-limited (for me, a few hours a month) but ongoing, so I have the opportunity to get to know the organization deeply and over years. As a board member, I am invited to provide strategic guidance and contribute to the vision, but have the honor of watching the committed staff members lead the work. Most of all, by joining a board, I have found myself in conversation with a diverse range of people who share my passion for social issues. Whether with staff or fellow board members or the public, these connections enrich my life and, I hope, make me a more effective and compassionate part of our community.

Don't get me wrong. There are times when board service is a stretch. I have a full-time job and young children and have to be realistic about what I can and can't take on. There are also administrative and operational aspects, such as developing agendas and reviewing policies, that

aren't the thrilling strategic moments that I most enjoy. For instance, boards hold fiduciary responsibility, which means taking the time to review budgets and provide financial oversight. (In this area, we have a number of [local resources, including CNL](#), working to equip board members with the skills they need.) Finally, many boards include a fundraising requirement, though this is often scarier in theory than in reality. At CBV, I make a modest monthly donation and have invited friends to sponsor our activities or support a family during the holidays. To my surprise, this outreach has been rewarding and is often met with, "I've been wanting to get involved -- I just didn't know where to start."

### **Why serve?**

Our community needs you. Local organizations have described the invaluable contributions of their boards:

"The [Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital Foundation](#) Board was actively working throughout the pandemic to ensure the programs and activities successfully continued and philanthropy could support the most important needs at the hospital."

"[[Citizens for Choice](#)] could not exist without our volunteer board members. All of us on our working board take on the range of responsibilities that need to be fulfilled for a successful nonprofit, from management, to finance, to communications, and to fund development and community relations."

"The [Hospice](#) Board of Directors and Board of Trustees are local community members who are dedicated to upholding the mission, articulating the vision, and ensuring that decisions are aligned with the organization's core values."

If this sounds meaningful to you, I hope that you will consider providing this much-needed guidance and support to an organization in our community. The opportunity is there. Join us.

*Check out a list of [CNL Members](#) as a start to finding the cause you care about.*

To share how you have been impacted by philanthropy, as a donor, volunteer, or recipient of services, email [info@cni Sierra.com](mailto:info@cni Sierra.com), and you could be featured in a future article.

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