

BOARD ENGAGEMENT: THE INFLUENCE - INVOLVEMENT MATRIX

Know Your Board Members

Not all Board members are the same. They have their own unique combinations of expertise, availability, passions, and access to capital. To maximize every Board member’s engagement and fully leverage their capacity for United Way, it is essential to understand them as individual members of the Board.

The Influence-Involvement Matrix

The **Influence-Involvement Matrix** helps the United Way Board Chair (or other applicable Board leader) and CEO evaluate the composition of their Board by focusing on each individual Board member’s engagement with United Way and the community at large. By understanding each individual Board member’s influence and involvement, the CEO and Board Chair is in a position to better plan and maximize the Board member’s engagement and contributions in ways that work for the Board member and drives high-performance and greater results for United Way.

Note: the Matrix and the definitions that follow are just one tool that the CEO and Board Chair can call upon to deepen an understanding of their Boards’ engagement. Head to [BoardWalk](#) for all resources available.

The Influence-Involvement Matrix evaluates Board member’s engagement across two dimensions:

- **Involvement:**
Time commitment, engagement on committees, meeting participation, engagement in community, and willingness to commit time and efforts to the mission and organization.
- **Influence:**
The strength and span of relationships in the community and across sectors, connections with influential decision makers, access to significant resources, and opportunities to position United Way.

		INFLUENCE	
		Low	High
INVOLVEMENT	High	Worker Bees	Super Stars
	Low	Bench Warmers	Angels

Influence-Involvement Matrix Definitions

1. Superstars - High Involvement/High Influence

"Superstars" refers to Board members that combine high involvement with high influence. Superstars are typically highly involved in all aspects of the organization. They are often the officers on the Board or very active committee chairs. At the same time, Superstars are so highly influential in the community that their leadership attracts others who are also highly influential. They have no trouble garnering resources and capital for the organization, either through personal contribution or through their wide network of influential contacts. Most non-profit organizations would be fortunate to have one true Superstar on the Board. Organizations with two Superstars can consider themselves blessed. And non-profit organizations with three or more Superstars have likely positioned themselves as among the most prestigious Boards in their community.

2. Angels - Low Involvement/High Influence

Angels are Board members who have low involvement with the organization, but hold high influence in the community. Angels are unlikely to attend more than one or two board meetings a year. They turn down committee chairs assignments and are unlikely to attend many committee meetings. However, Angels are committed to the organization. And typically once a year, you can make a request of an Angel and they will deliver. Because Angels are typically involved in so many other activities, it is important that requests be specific and have clear start and end dates. Requests may include making a call to request resources or lending their name to an important letter. Because of their commitment to the organization, Angels are more than willing to contribute in any way they can, as long as the request is clear, worthy of their involvement, and short in duration.

3. Worker Bees - High Involvement/Low Influence

In the typical non-profit organization, most Board members do not yield the influence of a Superstar or Angel. However, their commitment and dedication to the mission of the organization is unquestionable. We call this group Worker Bees. Typically, Worker Bees care so much about the organization that they are willing to commit the time to be heavily involved. Worker Bees likely attend every Board and committee meeting. They are willing to work between meetings to finalize plans, study reports, and interact with staff on implementing strategies. For non-profit organizations that are short on staff resources, Worker Bees are typically willing to fill in the gaps.

4. Bench Warmers - Low Involvement/Low Influence

Bench Warmer is the name we give to Board members who have low involvement with the organization and who also have low influence in the community. While few Board members start out as Bench Warmers, over time those with low influence and low involvement can become a drag on the organization. In essence, they are warming the seat until replaced by someone who can bring greater influence or involvement to the organization.

Board Type Definitions

There are many ways to classify or talk about your Board; the definitions below are just one tool that the CEO, Board Chair, and other Board members can use to build a shared communication style and a shared understanding.

An **Absentee Board** is dominated by Bench Warmers. Board Members don't show up for meetings, are not active outside of meetings, and do not provide significant support to the organization.

A **Low-Influence Board** is primarily made up of Worker Bees and Benchwarmers. The Board will be involved in the work of the organization, however, they will likely have trouble garnering the resources for sustaining or growing the organization.

A **Low-Involvement Board**, primarily includes Angels and Benchwarmers. This Board serves much more in an advisory capacity: members provide input, but seldom get their hands dirty.

A **Superstar Board** is full of Superstars. This Board brings a level of influence and involvement that helps the organization excel in numerous areas and is able to attract, engage, and sustain a large group of Superstars from year to year. This Board type may be unattainable for most non-profit organizations.

A **Stellar Board**, an attainable and achieving Board, consists of a majority of Worker Bees, a third Angels and the rest Superstars.

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How to Use This Document

Working together as partners, the CEO and the Board Chair should follow the steps below, actively discussing and working through each question.

- 1) REVIEW AND PLOT ON MATRIX INDIVIDUAL BOARD MEMBERS:** Focus on each individual Board member, one-by-one, and discuss their influence and involvement levels and plot them on the above matrix (graphic). Below are suggested questions to consider when making a decision, however, we recommend that you use questions that appropriately reflect your United Way’s needs and expectations.

Involvement

- Review the [United Way Volunteer Leadership Competencies](#) on United Way Online. To what extent do your Board members exhibit these characteristics?
- What is the Board member’s primary motivation to be a member of the United Way Board? (Mission? Personal/professional reputation? Network?)
- Is the Board member passionate about the organization? How does the Board member display it?
- How often does the Board member attend Board meetings? Other United Way events?

Influence

- What capital (financial, reputational, intellectual, and social) has the Board member brought to the organization? What has been the impact?
- What ability does the Board member have to influence others to support the organization?

- 2) REVIEW AND PLOT ON MATRIX BOARD AS A WHOLE:** Review your completed Influence-Involvement Matrix, paying attention to the Board as a whole.

- What does your Board look like? Is it an Absentee, Low-Influence, Low-Involvement, Superstar, or Stellar Board?
- What impact is your Board making?
- What potential is being lost? What opportunities are going unrealized?
- Are the seats being treated as the valuable (and scarce) items they are?
- What changes should be made?
- Does the Board work as a unit?
- Does the Board and CEO demonstrate an effective partnership?
- To what extent does the Board demonstrate the Attributes of a High-Performing Board and CEO Partnership?

- 3) PLAN YOUR ACTION:** Actions to consider for better engaging Board Leaders. Now that you have better picture of how your Board leaders map on the Influence/Involvement Matrix, you are able to make decisions and strategize on how to best leverage all of your Board members.

- Adopt and commit to a set of clear, minimum expectations that each Board members should agree to and sign. Note: be careful that the minimal expectations do not rule out Angels are Worker Bees.
- The Bench Warmers: Have a frank conversation about their purpose and value to United Way.
- The Worker Bees: invite them to an ad-hoc or issue committee as a non-Board member.
- The Angels: find their areas of interest and gain commitments on those areas or have them join a short, ad-hoc or non-Board member committee.
- The Super Stars: seek commitments to assist in finding, cultivating, and recruiting more Super Stars.
- The Board as a whole: commit to becoming a High-Performing Board.

Board Development Resources

[United Way Board Walk](#)

The BoardWalk provides United Ways with a set of practical resources that can understand the capacity and the capability of their board to deliver on organizational mission. It is organized to provide individuals and organizations with relevant information on how to build a High-Performing Board.

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