



## **Building your power core**

Curating your own personal  
board of directors

**Bringing intentionality to faculty career development**

# Introduction

Throughout our academic journeys, we have walked alongside faculty, advisors, administrators and staff who have mentored, inspired, and guided us towards our path to success.

**Whether new or well-established in our careers, support is critical for success yet often missing.**

For many academics, navigating teaching, research, tenure, promotion, or a possible career change is new territory, often unaccompanied by dependable professional development or guidance.

Difficult career decisions become more manageable, supported by a purposefully curated network—**a Personal Board of Directors (PBOD)**—to challenge, affirm, and counsel you on your career journey to support your goals.



# What is a personal board of directors

A PBOD is a group of four to six individuals to whom you turn for sponsorship, mentoring, aspiration, encouragement and hard truths.

You may already have an 'unofficial' board in place: **those you trust when you need professional advice.**

This is not another committee meeting for you to juggle but rather a network of leaders committed to seeing you thrive.

Each new change in your career requires a reassessment of your Personal Board of Directors (PBOD). The key question to consider is: "Does my existing board still align with my needs and goals?" With a mix of peers, mentors, and reach mentors on your PBOD, you welcome varied, objective viewpoints from career allies who will challenge you to make sense of your experiences, so you can make the best possible choices for your future.

You will appreciate having a wide network of individuals from inside and outside your field—whether your academic discipline or role—offering specific skillsets or experiences relevant to your current journey. Someone outside of academia can provide an objective point of view and some perspective beyond the academy.

Academic career paths are more fluid than ever before, compounding the complexity of career decisions. New student support positions, digital learning initiatives, educational vendors,

and consulting firms, among others, give you more choices for your academic career than any generation of academics before you.

As your career goals and needs change, you may want to reevaluate your PBOD to align with your new career and/or professional goals.

Most importantly, choose PBOD members you trust. The ultimate purpose of your board is to elevate you to be the best version of yourself. Your board members should be advocating for you, but to achieve the best outcomes, you and your board members must be able to have challenging conversations to hold you accountable. Seek out individuals you trust to receive your story and from whom you could receive difficult feedback. Find the people in your life who are both inspirational and aspirational to you because they may have gone through a similar experience from which you can learn.



## Choosing a board member

The value of choosing individuals from outside academia sets your board apart from a Promotion and Tenure (P&T) committee.

The P&T committee is responsible for **reviewing and evaluating a candidate's application materials, supporting documentation for promotion and tenure, and reporting on a candidate's qualifications to the Provost.**

While a PBOD can help you prepare for promotion and tenure by reviewing your materials and prepping practice interviews and presentations, they should be a sounding board when you need professional advice.

You may choose to overlap a P&T committee member with your PBOD, but **remember to choose someone who you trust, who will challenge you, and with whom you can reciprocate honesty.**

# Scenarios

Consider the following scenarios and how a POBD may help you navigate these everyday career situations.



## Scenario 1 Building your tenure portfolio

Imagine you are currently navigating a tenure track from assistant to associate professor—and how your work is credited between teaching, advising, committee work, research, and publication. You attract many students who seek you as academic or organizational advisor. How do you balance investing in students and activities that advance your career?

This is a great opportunity to ask your PBOD for perspective. Someone who has been through the tenure track before would be the ideal mentor. PBOD members can help you identify priorities and boundaries to support them, as well as ways to communicate your needs that will not impact your reputation or career.



## Scenario 2 More responsibility; same salary

You served as a faculty member for over 10 years. You are satisfied with your role, and your colleagues respect you. Recently you were offered the position of Department Chair. The position comes with more administrative responsibility, though the salary increase is not commensurate with your experience or the added responsibility.

This is a great opportunity to consult your PBOD. Decisions about salary are often sensitive topics, which require looking at the whole picture, including your personal life and long-term goals.

*Would a professional move like this result in a long-term gain?*

*Can you achieve your personal goals with the offered compensation?*

*Are there non-monetary benefits—like additional release time or flexibility to work from home—that might interest you?*

Your PBOD can help you navigate this and feel confident in the decision you make as you decide to accept the position or not.



## Scenario 3 Switching careers

After 25 years of teaching, you receive an opportunity to transition your career outside of academia. You know your presence at the institution is impactful, but this is a once in a lifetime opportunity.

A situation like this highlights the need for a diverse PBOD because you may need counsel from someone in this new field who can help you understand how your career may differ outside of academia.



A PBOD can help you with these very difficult personal and professional decisions by knowing you, your interests, and career goals.

You can also trust your PBOD to be unbiased because their only interest is your flourishing, not the needs of an institution.

This also presents an ideal moment to assess the current composition of your PBOD and consider if it will effectively guide you in this new endeavor. Is there a chance to introduce new and diverse perspectives to your board?

**How have these scenarios inspired your thoughts for who you might invite for conversation about these situations if you were in them?**

**Can you think of people who would support you through challenging decisions like these?**

**Who would you trust to have your best interest in mind?**

**Have you taken time to review the current makeup of your PBOD, recognizing that it should evolve throughout your career?**

These people you listed are potential members of your PBOD.



# Action plan

## I. Curating your PBOD roster

Where in your career would advice, mentoring or sponsorship be most helpful?  
 What kind of support are you seeking?

While only you can answer these questions when building your PBOD, there are three spheres of influence you may want to consider when forming your board.



**Peers on a similar journey.** As you progress in your career, peer-to-peer mentoring will be a helpful process for identifying your most vital skills and practicing mentorship with those who will eventually lead alongside you. Additionally, the strength of your peer connections will sustain you over the longevity of your career



**Mentors / coaches.** Mentors willingly offer you essential wisdom, empowering you to develop into the professional you aspire to be, while on the other hand, coaches are fantastic at training their professionals on how to become the best versions of themselves and make wiser decisions. Both mentors and coaches have significant work experience, are service leaders, and work to help you achieve your career goals.



**Sponsors.** Often able to unlock that final door to help you reach a new level in your career, sponsors have the capital to get you recognition and opportunities for growth within your organization. Sponsors occupy positions and environments that you do not have access to. Knowing your growth areas and professional wins will help them confidently advocate for you.



**In addition to those within your network who support you, there may be people outside your circle who you can leverage for support.** These might be leaders beyond your reach, authors, public speakers, or others whose contributions you value and who you consider ideas from without reciprocation.

An example of this would be an author whose book you read and valued and contributed to how you are conducting your professional life.

In addition to the spheres of influence, six characteristics can be helpful to consider when choosing your PBOD members.



You should maintain an updated and balanced PBOD so your board can effectively contribute to your career needs as they evolve.



You should review your PBOD roster on an annual basis and whenever there is a career-impacting change.



Finally, there is no reason to fret about hurting feelings when making changes to your PBOD so long as your changing needs and your gratitude for their support are clearly communicated.

## II. Inviting and retaining PBOD members

Some professionals like to make their PBOD appointments official. In contrast, others keep a private roster of who to call for what in times of need. Either way, strategic communication is essential when building a strong support system like a PBOD.

While a member of your board may not be aware that they are on your PBOD, you must know which role they will fulfill. Do they have a particular skillset, an outside perspective, or a similar journey to yours? And what approach will you take to invite members onto your PBOD?



**Three tried-and-true steps exist for connecting meaningfully with those you want on your PBOD.**



**Consider first** asking those with whom you have a personal connection, share a similar interest or field of study, or can reach through an introduction from someone in your current network. Establishing clear time expectations from the beginning promotes stronger commitment from those you are approaching.



**Next**, decide which form of outreach is appropriate, whether an email with an engaging subject line or connecting through a professional social network.



**Finally**, consider optimizing virtual and in-person opportunities like lunch, coffee, or conferences to extend invitations.

Continuous engagement with your PBOD is essential, especially with sponsors.

Focus on **these three keys** to ensure you get the most from your board members' advisement while respecting their time.



**First**, schedule recurring meetings and always come prepared with an agenda.

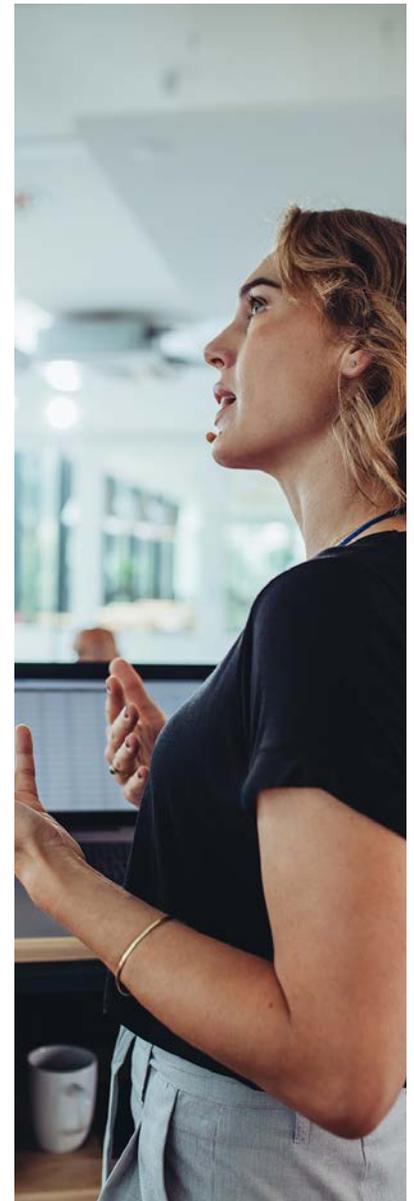


**Second**, tell your story and ask authentic questions.



**Lastly**, show reciprocity by providing your skills and showing interest in the work of your PBOD member.

Just as each of your PBOD members brings a unique set of skills and experiences to your board, your communication style (e.g., contact method and approach) will vary by member and sphere of influence.



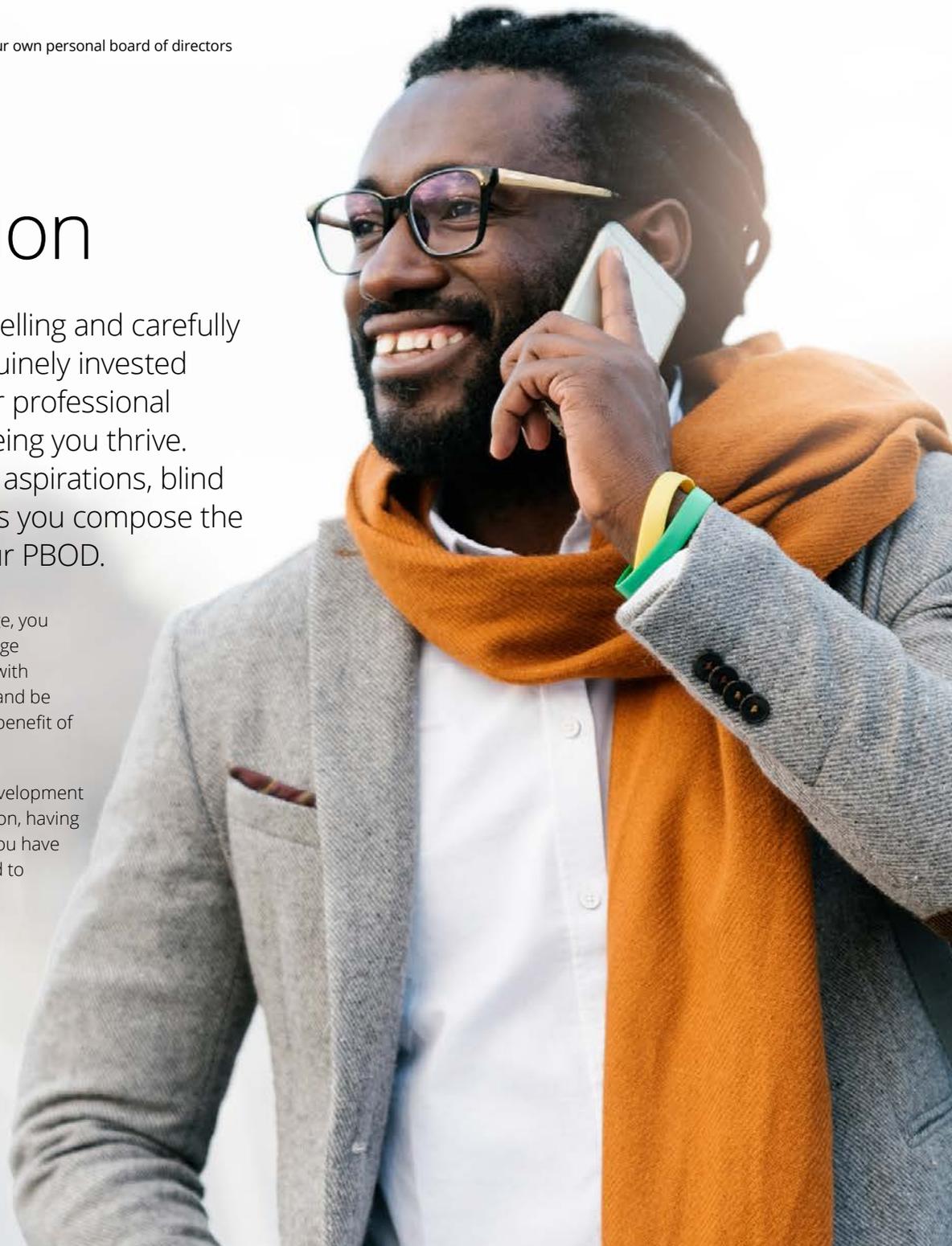
"Strategic communication is essential when building a strong support system like a PBOD".

# Conclusion

Your PBOD is a compelling and carefully curated network genuinely invested in the success of your professional development and seeing you thrive. Consider your career aspirations, blind spots, and intuition as you compose the perfect roster for your PBOD.

As your career and/or goals change, you should update your PBOD to change with you. Communicate regularly with them, meet them where they are and be intentional about maximizing the benefit of all they have to offer you.

Even as you enjoy professional development opportunities within your institution, having your own PBOD helps to ensure you have the support and counsel you need to succeed and thrive.



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Betty Fleurimond, principal, is a leader within Deloitte Consulting's Higher Education Practice and Chairs the governing board of Deloitte's [Center for Higher Education Excellence](#), a research center and leadership addressing the pressing challenges facing higher education today.

On April 1, 2022, Betty Fleurimond presented at Virginia Tech's 10th annual [Faculty Women of Color in the Academy Conference](#). The attendees' positive response to the presentation, *Lean on Me: Curating Your Own PBOD—Career Development with Intentionality*, was the whitepaper's inspiration as Deloitte acknowledges a strong need for mentorship in academia. Deloitte was a proud sponsor of the conference and thanks this group of powerful leaders in higher education for their work, impact and commitment to this space.

# Contributors

Thanks to the following Deloitte colleagues who contributed to the development of this piece:

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