

2022 Board Election Candidates

NYC Mesh

Brian Hall

Daniel Heredia

Ean Matthews

Marg Suarez

Oliver Fisher

Robert Johnson

Toby Sheppard Bloch

Zachary Giles

Brian Hall

Why do you want to be an NYC Mesh board member?

I'd like to continue being a board member to help ensure that we stay focused on our mission.

Describe the position of NYC Mesh board member as you understand it. We want to hear how you're thinking about the role so that we have better context for your survey answers.

The board's function is to satisfy the legal requirements of a non-profit, to follow the bylaws, and to make sure projects and large expenses are in keeping with our mission.

When your board term is complete, what would you like to have accomplished as a board member? What are your key priorities?

My key priority is that we maintain our focus on installing and maintaining our network, and keeping our administration costs very low. We also need to make sure that our decision making process remains decentralized, where interested parties can converge on suitable solutions. Groups should be able to make decisions that benefit their own neighborhoods without needing centralized decision making.

What skills or relevant experience would you bring to the NYC Mesh board?

I helped start the Mesh eight years ago, and I have experience in most aspects of the organization. I have been on the board since we first had a board and I have helped on many installs (150+?) from our first rooftop installs to our current fiber installs.

What prior non-profit and/or board-member experience do you have? If so, please tell us a little about how the experience went, any challenges you faced, and how you were able to successfully resolve them.

I helped organize our fiscal sponsorship before we registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit. This sponsorship from ISOC-NY allowed us to receive the grants which got us through the first few years.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your interest in serving as an NYC Mesh board member?

Daniel Heredia

Why do you want to be an NYC Mesh board member?

I want to be part of guiding the organization towards expansion, increased partnerships, and building community engagement in all New York City neighborhoods. Having been part of this community since the thick of the pandemic, I have seen the ebbs and flows that have shaped the Mesh thus far and want to expand our capabilities in fulfilling our mission to become truly community oriented.

Describe the position of NYC Mesh board member as you understand it. We want to hear how you're thinking about the role so that we have better context for your survey answers.

An NYC Mesh board member exists to protect the organization and its members in making sound fiduciary and legal decisions. I see my involvement in the board being focused towards providing direction to our members and volunteers, and liaising with other community groups that can help us with our mission to expand throughout the City. I see my involvement in the board, including more direct outreach to our member base, encouraging alternative forms of volunteering, such as increased outreach events, reaching out to nonprofits, and increasing our internship and stewardship opportunities.

When your board term is complete, what would you like to have accomplished as a board member? What are your key priorities?

In my board term, I would like to have increased our partnerships with non-profit groups and underserved areas, grown our volunteer base to account for increasing demand, and to form a proper outreach committee so we can continue to increase our member count in areas where the mesh currently serves and beyond. I also will like to have solidified more frameworks for how new members and volunteers are able to become involved, and ensure that our engagement with the member base is consistent and sustainable.

What skills or relevant experience would you bring to the NYC Mesh board?

I have extensive community outreach experience as a former community leader in Brooklyn, and in my current role as a Deputy Director of Outreach for a Council Member in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. These skills would help take the board into a direction where we can guide our members and volunteers towards doing more community building work, which is needed for our organization to build upon our volunteer base and to find other groups with competencies such as working with people who do not speak English and those with socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

What prior non-profit and/or board-member experience do you have? If so, please tell us a little about how the experience went, any challenges you faced, and how you were able to successfully resolve them.

In my prior work as Deputy Director of Operations with Little Haiti Bk, a burgeoning effort led by Brooklyn Democratic Committee Chair Rodneyse Bichotte, much of the work that I took part in involved working with people in communities I have not been experienced with. Much of the tasks involved leading, guiding, and working with groups who have varying missions and prerogatives to take part in community organizing. My involvement insured that these groups were able to work together despite contention and discord, prioritizing The communities that we are ultimately tasked with serving. Both from a political and racial standpoint, there are many parallels that can be drawn between this

experience and what an NYC Mesh board member may face, especially as we increase our reach into the corners of New York City.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your interest in serving as an NYC Mesh board member?

I am submitting this application to express my interest to run the board, but I will need to get my involvement approved by the Speaker of New York City Council for Conflict of Interest purposes. Thus, if my participation is not approved, I will request for the standing board to rescind my application upon notice, before the final date of the election."

Ean Matthews

Why do you want to be an NYC Mesh board member?

I think as the mesh adapts and grows it will need to increasingly confront legal and other non-techie issues which I feel I am well-qualified to help address; things like interacting with external businesses, governmental and other organizations; putting more structure into mesh's operations; decision-making to help the mesh grow and have a more diverse base.

Describe the position of NYC Mesh board member as you understand it. We want to hear how you're thinking about the role so that we have better context for your survey answers.

The way I see it, board members should reach out to and listen to the members, work out what's most important to the mesh overall (you can't do 'everything') and make decisions that set the big picture direction for the org's in line with the mesh's stated non-profit objectives.

When your board term is complete, what would you like to have accomplished as a board member? What are your key priorities?

(1) I think the mesh can and should grow - a lot! - while staying true to it's original purpose/goals. It's incredible what the mesh has done starting from scratch, but there are a lot of resources out there the mesh can tap into to reach more people. We can do a lot more to partner with external organizations, governmental and other non-profits and learn from these other organizations. So many people love the idea of the mesh and are keen to help. I'd like to see up 'operationalize' that. (2) Our board election and governance processes should be simplified and streamlined (including this board election process...! :-)). I believe there may also be more of a role for direct member engagement/voting on issues. (3) help protect mesh (and members) from liability and other legal issues.

What skills or relevant experience would you bring to the NYC Mesh board?

I've been practicing technology law since for over 30 years. I pretty much 'seen it all,' coming and going, good and bad, for-profits and non-profits. I can bring that experience to the table, help advise/contribute to the board and protect the mesh.

What prior non-profit and/or board-member experience do you have? If so, please tell us a little about how the experience went, any challenges you faced, and how you were able to successfully resolve them.

I've been advising a wide variety of non-profits (and other boards) as a lawyer for over 30 years in Australia, Canada, the US and UK (mostly technology organizations/legal issues and more general operations). The biggest challenges I've seen are: (1) fundraising (at least in the US) and (2) motivating people to show up and contribute. (1) is less of an issue for the mesh because of the way installs are set up, but we still need to find ways to access government other sources if we are going to grow. To meet this challenge in the past I've just sought out the right people/relationships and made it happen. On a similar note, to meet (2) I've reached out to and worked with organizations to find and implement the right 'partnership model' - usually a mix of volunteers and some paid personnel to make sure the job gets done.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your interest in serving as an NYC Mesh board member?

Underlying all of the above, I like to roll my sleeves up and get things done - show up, go on installs (I've been on more than I can easily count over the over the last ~3 years, large and small) and other events, learn from people who know more than I do and pass that on to others. On the bigger picture, since I started with the mesh, I've always had this feeling that it's on the cusp of turning into something important, but in a low key, grass roots way. That's what I'd really like to help happen (whether or not via the board, or some other way...)

Marg Suarez

Why do you want to be an NYC Mesh board member?

NYC Mesh is undergoing a crucial period in the organization's development. We have a record number of installs, money in the bank, and a volunteer base whose talents have yet to be fully harnessed. We are taking on larger and more complicated projects, requiring vision and strategy as well as fiscal and legal interaction with various entities. I would like to lend my talents and experience to contribute to the growth and direction of NYC Mesh during this time of evolution.

Describe the position of NYC Mesh board member as you understand it. We want to hear how you're thinking about the role so that we have better context for your survey answers.

One of the beautiful things about NYC Mesh is the diversity of our members' backgrounds and experiences. In addition to making sure we fulfill our fiscal and legal obligations, board members should provide leadership and encouragement to the members; facilitate group decision-making; delegate tasks (including leadership tasks); and generally support volunteers to manage projects that the membership has proposed. In other words, the board will help the organization accomplish our mission, though they will not be responsible for doing the work themselves (unless they wish to be). Another key board role is to facilitate the interface of NYC Mesh with other entities, developing relationships advantageous to the work of the organization.

When your board term is complete, what would you like to have accomplished as a board member? What are your key priorities?

In the past year or so I have been concentrating some of my volunteer work on creating systems to make NYC Mesh more efficient, productive, and sustainable. My key priority is to help NYC Mesh scale to include larger projects and to expand our reach beyond LES and central Brooklyn. This likely will involve helping the organization to tackle complicated questions such as how to incorporate paid staff into a previously all-volunteer model – not a small feat. Good communication, cooperation, and inclusivity is key. When my board term is complete I hope to see that we have developed a structure in keeping with our mission which helps us reach these goals.

What skills or relevant experience would you bring to the NYC Mesh board?

By trade, I am a seasoned elevator mechanic, which requires the synthesis of a variety of skills: mechanical, engineering, troubleshooting, and interpersonal. I have been a union member for 19 years, so I understand labor issues. Before that, I worked for 4 years as a grant administrator at a nonprofit organization (Nontraditional Employment for Women), where I learned outreach, advocacy, and grant writing skills. I started my own hurricane relief project and led women's construction brigades to Nicaragua to help with reconstruction after Hurricane Mitch. I worked as a Unix systems programmer for 11 years. I hold degrees in Computer Science and in Women's and Gender Studies. During my time with NYC Mesh, I have contributed to the design of the support Mesh bot, roll-out of phone auto-attendant and voicemail, and the install-team onboarding process. I assisted with the successful response to the NYC Broadband RFP. I worked on a few more grant proposals including the successful application to Americorps*VISTA, resulting in 5 full-time supported volunteer positions to build NYC Mesh's capacity for community outreach and network development.

What prior non-profit and/or board-member experience do you have? If so, please tell us a little about how the experience went, any challenges you faced, and how you were able to successfully resolve them.

In the early 2000's, I was involved in forming Tradeswomen Now and Tomorrow, a national policy organization promoting high-skill, high-wage jobs for women in the building and construction trades. I served for several years on the board as the communications coordinator and recording secretary. Like NYC Mesh, most of our collaboration was done remotely, but this was perhaps more challenging because it was national. My first contribution was to facilitate our communications, which prior to my joining were manually maintained lists of email addresses in the "CC" field (we did not have Slack!). I created a website and electronic mailing lists for all the working committees, which helped greatly when the organization launched with a national meeting in Washington, DC. Ultimately funding of women in the trades was cut back due to an inhospitable presidential administration followed by the 2008 economic recession, and the organization dissolved. However much of the national policy work we performed and documented is still being used today.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your interest in serving as an NYC Mesh board member?

I heard about NYC Mesh at the start of the pandemic, but didn't think much about it as I already had a pretty good internet connection. At the start of the pandemic, I read more and more accounts of commercial ISPs' poorly performing connections, and people spoke highly of NYC Mesh. Eventually, I read about the new supernode in Industry City, not far from my home, and I started to pay attention. While installing my rooftop node in February 2021, I got familiar with using Slack, and attended a few organizational Zooms. The volunteers there were so welcoming, it was not long before I felt empowered to contribute. I bring various technical and organizational experience to the table along with passion, commitment, and decent communication skills. I would use these qualities to strengthen the organization and our volunteer base as NYC Mesh expands its reach.

Oliver Fisher

Why do you want to be an NYC Mesh board member?

Having watched the mesh grow from just an idea shared among a few people to what it is today, I care a lot about our network and community. I hope to contribute my experience to help it continue to grow and stay healthy.

Describe the position of NYC Mesh board member as you understand it. We want to hear how you're thinking about the role so that we have better context for your survey answers.

I believe the board should be as minimal as possible. It really only exists so that the mesh can have a legal entity to sign contracts for things like fiber leases and space at internet exchange points. I don't think it should be involved in day to day operations or setting the long term direction of the mesh. That should be and is the responsibility of the community, and the board should serve as a rubber stamp to support its wishes.

When your board term is complete, what would you like to have accomplished as a board member? What are your key priorities?

As a board member, I hope to have approved all large purchases requested by the community. Personally, I hope to have replaced the giant spreadsheet we use to keep track of everything like nodes, members and join requests with a proper database. I think this will not only make all of our lives easier as volunteers but also help make it more accessible for people around the world to start their own community meshes.

What skills or relevant experience would you bring to the NYC Mesh board?

My only nonprofit and board member experience is with the mesh. It's been a bit challenging getting up and running, especially because much of our formal structure was instituted during the beginning of the pandemic. I hope that as elections become a more routine occurrence we will all become more comfortable with the process and responsibilities of a being a formal nonprofit.

What prior non-profit and/or board-member experience do you have? If so, please tell us a little about how the experience went, any challenges you faced, and how you were able to successfully resolve them.

I am a software engineer and helped set up and maintain a lot of the systems we use to manage running the mesh like our node map, network database, line of sight tool and donation page. As a result, I'm pretty familiar with all the odds and ends of how things get done. I also have personally experienced many of the challenges we've faced over the years as an organization and I've learned a lot about what it takes to help foster a healthy network and community.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your interest in serving as an NYC Mesh board member?

Robert Johnson

Why do you want to be an NYC Mesh board member?

As a long-time member and community contributor, I care about seeing the organization thrive. I think that my professional experience, and experience in other community-based institutions leaves me with valuable skills and insights that would make me useful as a board member.

Describe the position of NYC Mesh board member as you understand it. We want to hear how you're thinking about the role so that we have better context for your survey answers.

I believe the board has the authority to sign contracts and control where money from grants and donations eventually goes. It also has some control over internal organizational procedures such as elections. In practice, a great deal of the board's authority is delegated to certain community members, and employees. I believe a role of the board going forward would be to clarify and examine this delegation process to make sure we are achieving and encouraging as much community participation as we can.

When your board term is complete, what would you like to have accomplished as a board member? What are your key priorities?

As a "core volunteer", I would like to see a greater number of "Core volunteers" but also a greater number of "casual volunteers" and cross-organizational relationships.

What skills or relevant experience would you bring to the NYC Mesh board?

I am an electrical engineer and professionally manage telecommunications projects. More recently, I manage grant programs for the state related to digital expansion and digital equity. I have a huge amount of exposure to how professional telecommunication companies are managed, and how government interacts with them (and how government interacts with small nonprofits like Mesh). I think this set of exposures is particularly helpful in the context of the board if we are looking to understand potential partners within government, philanthropy, non-profit, or telecommunications. I also have significant experience within community-based organizations, especially those that are relatively flatly structured. I care deeply about nurturing leadership from within, and think I understand how to "lead from within" rather than "lead from the top".

What prior non-profit and/or board-member experience do you have? If so, please tell us a little about how the experience went, any challenges you faced, and how you were able to successfully resolve them.

I have never been on a board before, but have significant experience in decentralized community organizations such as my 400 person dorm in college where I was dorm president, and a community hacker space called HackManhattan. In both of these instances I have seen significant hardship and interpersonal issues within these communities, and seen those kinds of issues dealt with through two things: 1- Clear structures of accountability, 2- Long term relationship building. I think Mesh can benefit from both of those things

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your interest in serving as an NYC Mesh board member?

I am excited for the challenge. I think we have significant growing to do, but that the work will be worth it!

Toby Sheppard Bloch

Why do you want to be an NYC Mesh board member?

NYC Mesh is an amazing piece of public infrastructure that could reimagine how we build value and community in NYC. Participating in Mesh has introduced me to an amazing community and I want to be a part of building tools for the next chapter in Mesh's success.

Describe the position of NYC Mesh board member as you understand it. We want to hear how you're thinking about the role so that we have better context for your survey answers.

Ensure regulatory compliance and help guide the community through growth, the current phase of which is putting strain on the all volunteer culture that got Mesh to this point

When your board term is complete, what would you like to have accomplished as a board member? What are your key priorities?

Developing a business case and operating model that supports expansion to multi family buildings. And solidifying community partnerships in Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx so existing organizers can effectively collaborate with Mesh and start building new capacity for installs and support that is embedded in the communities we are expanding into.

What skills or relevant experience would you bring to the NYC Mesh board?

Extensive non-profit management experience; led a social enterprise that performed fee for service activities that competed with private sector; have participated in multi-year social enterprise accelerator that provided me with toolset for developing and implementing business plans; participate in racial equity economic mobility network with leaders across city (including in City Government and the Mayor's Office; affordable housing operators)

What prior non-profit and/or board-member experience do you have? If so, please tell us a little about how the experience went, any challenges you faced, and how you were able to successfully resolve them.

Brooklyn Queens Community Land Trust; 1 staff person and expectation Board could fill other gaps; tasks needed to be completed on volunteer basis burned out lots of talented board members because organization didn't have sufficient staff capacity.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your interest in serving as an NYC Mesh board member?

I've learned a ton and had even more fun working on Mesh and look forward to continue to leverage my experience to contribute to the community.

Zachary Giles

Why do you want to be an NYC Mesh board member?

I care about where the organization is going and how it is developing. I would like to help the organization not turn in to a mess like other non profits who have fell off-center of their main mission. Additionally, I believe our organization has a very unique set of values and way of working, which I believe is worth preserving.

Describe the position of NYC Mesh board member as you understand it. We want to hear how you're thinking about the role so that we have better context for your survey answers.

My view of the board is that it is there to help ensure the legal and ethical obligations of the organization are met, by fulfilling what is required by law; and, to regulate the spend and purpose of the donated funds that members willingly contributed, such that they are well-spend for on-mission work. The board also can be a good touch point for other organization to connect with to help create collaborations, which often have a legal component. I don't believe the board's role should extend to day-to-day work or design of the systems the organization produces.

When your board term is complete, what would you like to have accomplished as a board member? What are your key priorities?

I would like to see us have a better understanding and workflow for staff, where we and others feel very comfortable with the way it is working, and that our volunteers don't feel slighted. I would also like to see us in all five boroughs, especially through collaborations and partnerships with other organizations which can get us more deeply connected in those areas.

What skills or relevant experience would you bring to the NYC Mesh board?

In board work, I have been on the board of 3 non-profits over the past 15 years, with diverse missions, including some challenging board situations (expanded in the next question) I have also been with NYC Mesh for 7 years as a volunteer, speaking to the org's structure and growth pattern, as well as the technical side. I also have much experience working with outside organizations such as vendors, governments such as cities, other mesh-like organizations, bodies such as ISOC, nynog, battlemesh/freifunk, peering organizations, etc. This experience, I believe, is very useful to NYC Mesh to ensure we don't ""get taken for a ride"" by vendors we need to work with, nor by over-promising things to entities such as pseudo-/governments.

What prior non-profit and/or board-member experience do you have? If so, please tell us a little about how the experience went, any challenges you faced, and how you were able to successfully resolve them.

I've been on the board of 3 non-profits. Each had its challenges. 1) A hackerspace that several friends and I started. I was on the board for 3 years. 2) A church, on the board for 7 years total over separate times. Served as the secretary for 3 years, making 20+ pages of notes per month. Had many challenges with leadership over direction. Over the years, I gain trust and helped contribute well to changing staff, bylaws, etc, and eventually became the VP. 3) NYC Mesh experience since the past 3 years. In the hackerspace organization, Our board grew large and complicated, the entity was not growing. I helped pioneer that we should shrink the board, become non-working, and begin applying

ourselves as peer-members, not overlords. It worked and I was the first to give up my board-seat, followed by 3 others the same year. Today the organization is very successful and has transitioned to a fully different set of people, while many of us remain as standard members. In the church organization, leadership trust was very challenging to attain. Through helping to align our focus with concise minutes and agendas, I was able to become part of many of the initiatives and remove many old focuses. Creating a system to catalogue our resolutions and decisions helped greatly.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your interest in serving as an NYC Mesh board member?

As mentioned, I'm very interested in making sure the organization stays lean and focused so we can push heavily into our mission. Thanks!