

# How to write a board cover letter

**Part of IoD Ireland's Director Development Toolkit**

# Introduction

In the past, cover letters were often seen as a polite formality — an introduction to your application that briefly expressed your interest in the role. They were often overlooked in the evaluation process, particularly for non-executive director (NED) positions.

Today, however, the role of a NED cover letter has evolved significantly. While it still serves as an introduction, its primary purpose is now to clearly and persuasively outline why you are the ideal candidate for the board position. In this guide, we will help you craft your cover letter to highlight your strategic value, convey your passion for the role, and reassure the board chair that you are more than a capable candidate for the board position.

# Contents

How to write a board cover letter	4
What to include	5
Cover letter examples	6

# How to write a board cover letter

**Most board positions will require both a board CV and cover letter as part of the application process.**

A cover letter will need investment of your time in crafting it specifically to respond to the requirements of each board role you are putting yourself forward for. Spend time researching the company to understand its strategy and business model, understanding sectoral challenges and key trends. Show the chair you understand the business, the composition of the board, board committee structures, the needs of the board and how you are the ideal non-executive director to meet their needs.

The cover letter plays a critical role in answering the question **'Why should we consider this candidate for this board vacancy?'**. The ideal cover letter will leave a prospective chair in no doubt as to your board value. It should demonstrate your fit for the role. Your goal is to make the shortlist. This guide will take you through the process and outline the fundamentals of a board cover letter.

# What to include

**A board cover letter should be respectful of the audiences' time and ideally kept to one page. It should include the following elements in this recommended order:**

## **Address / email address:**

Always include traditional letter formatting to ensure it looks professional — include both the recipients address as well as your address. For email, your location can be included at the top of the email for example 'Dublin, 1st January 20XX'.

## **Opening section:**

Letter format should include date, title of role you are applying for and formal greeting 'Dear Mr / Ms Chair Name or Surname depending on the formality of the organisation. Email format should include Ref: Role applying for and greeting 'Dear John.'

## **Set the context:**

The introductory paragraph should create a strong first impression by getting straight to the reason why you are interested in being considered for this board role. Show your passion for the role, explain why you are interested and why they should be interested in you. Instil confidence that you are a strong candidate for further consideration. This section is key to capture their interest sufficiently to want to read more about you. This section can include the executive summary used in your CV and should, at a minimum, showcase the top 3-5 details you want the reader to know about you. Not a plotted history of your entire career but a high-level summary and your key selling points as they relate to this role.

## **Evidence of experience:**

The next paragraphs should clearly and succinctly give evidence of the experience and skills you have that are relevant to this role. This section needs the most work. Invest time here in reviewing what they are looking for and the most relevant examples you have to demonstrate your evidence of this experience. Mirror the language the company / organisation use in the role specification.

Role specifications often include essential and desirable skills and experiences required, make sure you give evidence of both. You can combine some criteria together for example Chair, Committee Chair and sector experience could all be combined in one sentence e.g. 'Chair of ABC Ltd and Audit Committee Chair of listed organisation in the energy sector from 2017-2022'.

Depending on the number of criteria listed, the evidence of experience section may take several paragraphs. Make sure you give the chair or interview panel a sense of how you operate in the boardroom as well as your experience. Cultural fit on boards is a key screening criteria and prospective chairs will ask themselves if you will be a good fit. Ensure you are succinct; use language they will understand and demonstrate the impact you had. Ensure that you have addressed all of the essential criteria and as many of the desired criteria as possible, as outlined in the role requirements.

## **Final impressions:**

To close the cover letter, reiterate your interest in the role, summarise why you are the ideal fit for their needs and assure them you have the time and energy to commit to this board. Address any potential conflicts and questions the board may have regarding your suitability. Remind the reader of the 3-5 key areas of focus you would bring to this board. Make yourself memorable — perhaps disclose a personal interest outside your professional career.

Your goal in this section is to make the shortlist — your cover letter should reflect you at your best. Make sure your contact details (mobile number and email address) are easily accessible. Finish the cover letter with a formal closing salutation.

## **Practical details:**

- If sending your application via email the cover letter can be used as the main body of the email but also consider attaching the cover letter as a word document too.
- Label the name of the file professionally e.g. 'Don Dundon Cover Letter'.
- Make sure your cover letter is laid out professionally.
- Use a regular font and ensure the font size is at least 11pt.
- Avoid acronyms and jargon — use the lens of "could anyone outside my sector understand my cover letter?"
- Use non-executive director vocabulary and reflect the vocabulary / keywords used in the role specification.
- Before hitting send on an email application double check you have the right files attached — you don't get a second chance to make a great first impression.
- Check all spellings.

# Cover letter example

122 The Rise,  
Sandyford,  
Dublin 18

Chair ABC Ltd  
Acorn House,  
Leeson Street,  
Dublin 2

1<sup>st</sup> May 20XX

Dear John,

**Ref: Non-Executive Director of ABC Ltd.**

I am writing in application for the non-executive director position at ABC Ltd. As a seasoned executive, non-executive director, and entrepreneur, I am drawn to ABC Ltd.'s significant international consumer impact. My experience in digital, financial, and change management aligns well with your transformation and digitalisation goals.

I have built the range of experience, knowledge and behaviours you are seeking through a career which, at an early stage, involved a key role in a start-up business in the health services sector. This company was successfully sold to a major industry player, and I joined their business and broadened my international experience, along with my digital transformation and risk management expertise. In the second half of my executive career, I moved into multinational organisations across US and Ireland in senior operational management roles.

My key strengths, as they relate to your requirements, are outlined below:

**Finance**

I have managed an international services P&L of US\$100m and I have sat on the finance / audit committees of all the boards I have served on.

**Governance, strategy, influence and behaviours**

I am a Chartered Director and have sat on boards as a non-executive director since 2012, contributing to developing and steering strategy across both private and public organisations. I chair the audit committee on the board of DEF plc and as a trained coach I am effective in the role of "critical friend" to the CEO as a non-executive director.

**Change management**

Organisational change was a constant in my executive career in Healthcare United and I led the restructuring of the operation from loss making to strong profitability including the establishment of an Eastern European division and the creation of 800 new roles. As non-executive director on the board of DEF plc I oversee the change management required to deliver on our 2030 strategic plan.

**Digital**

I spent the first 25 years of my career in the technology industry and would bring deep technology expertise to the board of ABC Ltd. I lead on cyber security and business continuity planning on the board of DEF plc and oversaw the digital transformation of Healthcare United resulting in 40% of revenues from digital solutions and customer satisfaction increasing 3x.

Having completed my term as a non-executive director at Children's Inc. in September 2023, I am seeking a new board position in the private sector. I aim to contribute to business growth internationally and drive digital transformation. Given ABC Ltd's significant consumer impact and inclusive culture, I would be delighted to join its board. I bring independent judgment, a diverse skillset, and the highest standards of integrity and probity.

I look forward to hearing from you and can be contacted at joan@joanjones.com or on 087 2222222.

Yours sincerely,  
Joan Jones

# Cover letter — body of email example

1<sup>st</sup> May 20XX

Dear John,

**Ref: Non-Executive Director of ABC Ltd.**

I am writing in application for the non-executive director position at ABC Ltd. As a seasoned executive, non-executive director, and entrepreneur, I am drawn to ABC Ltd.'s significant international consumer impact. My experience in digital, financial, and change management aligns well with your transformation and digitalisation goals.

I have built the range of experience, knowledge and behaviours you are seeking through a career which, at an early stage, involved a key role in a start-up business in the health services sector. This company was successfully sold to a major industry player, and I joined their business and broadened my international experience, along with my digital transformation and risk management expertise. In the second half of my executive career, I moved into multinational organisations across US and Ireland in senior operational management roles.

My key strengths, as they relate to your requirements, are outlined below:

**Finance**

I have managed an international services P&L of US\$100m and I have sat on the finance / audit committees of all the boards I have served on.

**Governance, strategy, influence and behaviours**

I am a Chartered Director and have sat on boards as a non-executive director since 2012, contributing to developing and steering strategy across both private and public organisations. I chair the audit committee on the board of DEF plc and as a trained coach I am effective in the role of "critical friend" to the CEO as a non-executive director.

**Change management**

Organisational change was a constant in my executive career in Healthcare United and I led the restructuring of the operation from loss making to strong profitability including the establishment of an Eastern European division and the creation of 800 new roles. As non-executive director on the board of DEF plc I oversee the change management required to deliver on our 2030 strategic plan.

**Digital**

I spent the first 25 years of my career in the technology industry and would bring deep technology expertise to the board of ABC Ltd. I lead on cyber security and business continuity planning on the board of DEF plc and oversaw the digital transformation of Healthcare United resulting in 40% of revenues from digital solutions and customer satisfaction increasing 3x.

Having completed my term as a non-executive director at Children's Inc. in September 2023, I am seeking a new board position in the private sector. I aim to contribute to business growth internationally and drive digital transformation. Given ABC Ltd's significant consumer impact and inclusive culture, I would be delighted to join its board. I bring independent judgment, a diverse skillset, and the highest standards of integrity and probity.

I look forward to hearing from you and can be contacted at [joan@joanjones.com](mailto:joan@joanjones.com) or on 087 2222222.

Yours sincerely,  
Joan Jones



**Institute of Directors Ireland**  
Indigo Building, Whitaker Square,  
Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin 2, D02 P2X8

+353 (0) 1 411 0010  
[info@iodireland.ie](mailto:info@iodireland.ie)  
[iodireland.ie](http://iodireland.ie)