

**Mary Francia (IDP-C),
Member of the IDP Corporate Governance Alumni Network
Advisory Committee**

The Author



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Advocate & Connect Board Search Initiative

IDP Corporate Governance Network Alumni Club (IDPN) in support of the INSEAD Corporate Governance Initiative launched the Advocate & Connect Board Search Initiative in April 2015.

ICGI interviews Mary Francia, IDPN Advisory Committee Member and Initiative Chair

Mary Francia is a Certified Director (INSEAD IDP-C) with a longstanding experience with Fortune 500 companies in Europe and the Americas, supporting CEOs in leading strategic change, leveraging global macro trends, emerging technologies, and new business models. Strategy is a key component in the transformation of a business and she feels that boards should engage more in directing the strategy of a company.

As a member of the IDP Network Advisory Committee, Mary supports projects that extend and develop the benefits of attending the International Directors Programme, in terms of networking, exchange of content and supporting the INSEAD Corporate Governance Initiative.

What is the Advocate & Connect Board Search Initiative and how was it conceived?

This is an initiative by the IDPN for its alumni and was created in response to feedback from previous IDP participants about the kind of activities that would be beneficial to them. In a survey conducted late 2014, the majority indicated that they would like to access more board seats.

We want to advocate the advancement of our members in the boardroom, and to provide a platform that connects qualified certified directors with board opportunities. In simple terms, it is a private (confidential) and free channel for directors and executives who are certified by INSEAD to find board seats and for companies to enrich its board composition and governance.

This initiative is also an opportunity for the school's institutional partners, ICGI sponsors and all the companies that our alumni work for, to communicate their board openings. Note: a) There are over 1,000 INSEAD alumni working in private equity firms worldwide and their companies could connect with board members via this initiative. b) ICGI partners have centres for corporate governance and could enrich their offerings to their clients with qualified board candidates. c) Current alumni in C-level and Board Level can extend this benefit to their companies.

Would it help to also clarify what it is not?

It is not a website where a director goes and applies for a posted position; neither is it a website with listed directors for companies to contact. It is not a job bank and neither directors nor positions are listed.

‘The chairman should not be controlling, but in fact be a skilled listener and one who is able to draw out the group wisdom of the board.’

What is the purpose of the initiative? Why do we need this?

We would like to support the mission of the IDPN, which is to raise the effectiveness and efficiency of boards, with INSEAD IDP-C as members; and to advocate its certified directors and the IDP Programme.

Today, we need to advocate more effectively via social networks and leverage our own networks. Though board roles are being listed via search firms these days, yet networking continues to be its main channel for promoting positions.

Who benefits from this?

ICGI partners, sponsors and the INSEAD Alumni can post board positions. Everyone in the IDPN is engaged however only IDP-C directors are invited to apply. We would also like to encourage past IDP participants to complete their certification.

Why do they need to be certified to avail of this service? Is it not enough that they have completed the IDP?

An INSEAD IDP-C director is somebody who can show that the lessons learnt during the programme can be implemented into board context.

What is the certification process?

Once you have completed the IDP, which is a programme of three modules taken over one year, you have an opportunity to demonstrate the mastery of these skills and competencies, and how you apply the lessons into your board situation. You can choose which lessons you want to bring into your board for your certification. For example, you can evaluate if your board process reflects what the markets and shareholders expect today and how you can enhance this process. You must prepare a paper and a committee of the IDP faculty will evaluate and grant the certification, if requirements are met.

What is the difference between IDPN and the Advocate & Connect Initiative?

The initiative is part of what IDPN offers, adding resources and networking to their members.

But like LinkedIn and other social networks, can't they talk about job opportunities within IDPN?

They certainly can, but sometimes, you may want to keep your board requirements confidential; or enlarge your reach of potential candidates. This initiative gives you the platform for that.

So how does it work and what is the process?

As the chair of the IDPN Advocate & Connect initiative, I'm talking to recruiters and companies who have an interest in posting a board role. The information captured for a board position is brief: company profile, candidate profile, time commitment, board compensation, and deadline for applying. My role is to facilitate the process and to ensure that the position matches the right level for our members. Having just launched, we are open to every type of postings from new ventures, private or public companies. We've had a great response to our first posting for a venture capital firm and just listed our first NGO (non-paid) board role. We also have some local "advocates" from our IDPN that can help us channel opportunities in different parts of the world.

The board opportunity is sent via a personal and private email (not mass email) to all members of the IDPN. Qualified candidates can reply with a short statement of interest and a CV. Their information is kept confidential and forwarded only to the company of interest. That is where our job ends. The company reviews profiles for fit and contacts the candidate directly.

'We would like to support the mission of the IDPN, which is to raise the effectiveness and efficiency of boards.'

Are you like a match-maker?

Yes and No. Yes, that we provide an opportunity for a board match but no, in that, we don't vet or qualify their fit if they choose to apply. At this level, applicants already know themselves if they can add value to the board, based on the company and industry profile and how they fit to the requirement listed.

Generally, how do companies in the world find board members?

Generally, board members reach into their network. CEOs in the industry are common candidates yet we see more C-Level executives with functional expertise being invited to balance board expertise and diversity. Recruiters sometimes provide a richer pool of candidates and a valid approved process for board selection, yet that depends of the size of the company. Nominating committees of companies are often involved in this process.

What is different about INSEAD's IDP compared to other directors' programmes?

There are several very good programmes out there but the main difference is that each of these target a specific market or industry need of that country. The IDP Programme however is truly international, for experienced board members, and one that goes more in-depth in key areas of corporate governance. The diversity of knowledge of its international participants enriches the discussions and perspectives in the classroom when we analyse information or work on cases. This doesn't happen in other programmes.

What are the anticipated challenges?

We are going to learn along the way, and enhance the service as it develops. We will focus on maintaining its differentiator and its mission as we encourage more IDPN members and INSEAD alumni to use it.

What are your concluding thoughts?

As a director in today's world your power to create and protect value in a company, as well as your responsibilities and exposure to failure is quite visible. Shareholders and activists have a stronger and louder voice and it is quite a serious responsibility to be an effective director on a board. The IDP and the ICGI have grown rapidly and we would like to support its members with this initiative. **We seek support from all INSEAD alumni to share the Advocate and Connect Board Search Initiative with their companies, to advocate for the level and the availability of certified directors from INSEAD to their company boards.**

For reference:

IDP – INSEAD International Directors Programme

A unique educational experience aimed at the development of more effective directors and leads qualified candidates to The INSEAD Certificate in Corporate Governance credential.

IDP-C - Holders of the INSEAD Certificate in Corporate Governance

Participants who successfully complete the three modules devoted respectively to Board effectiveness; Board decision-making and oversight; and the Development of Director Effectiveness. Candidates are invited to apply their learning on the IDP to their board contexts and to demonstrate mastery of their director skills and competences, as expected for obtaining INSEAD's certification. Candidates must also display the necessary credibility for a board position.

IDPN - The INSEAD IDP Alumni Corporate Governance Network

An INSEAD Alumni Network that promotes excellence in corporate governance and provides its members with opportunity for exchange and further development.

ICGI - The INSEAD Corporate Governance Initiative

Cutting-edge research and teaching on the factors contributing to board and director effectiveness. An initiative designed to foster a global dialogue on the challenges facing boards in an international context. Provides opportunities to discuss and exchange on these issues .