

## Responsibilities: Board of Directors

- ❑ Keeps the organization's mission, values, and vision out front.
- ❑ Long range planning for the organization.
- ❑ Monitors fiscal management and maintains accountability to funders and donors.
- ❑ Review and approves the annual budget, major program plans, and organizational policies.
- ❑ Ensure the adequate resources are available to the organization.
- ❑ Evaluates the organizational effectiveness.
- ❑ Hires and evaluates the executive director.
- ❑ Represents public need and interest within the organization.
- ❑ Represents the organization to the public, especially to sources of financial support.

## Responsibilities: Individual Directors

- ❑ Participate actively in meetings and decision-making.
- ❑ Asks questions!
- ❑ Be well informed about what the organization does and how it does it, and about the environment in which the agency operates.
- ❑ Promote the organization's purpose and programs in the community.
- ❑ Give to the organization.

## What a Board of Directors Does Not Do

- ❑ Hire, evaluate, or fire staff other than the executive director.
- ❑ Approve individual bills for payment.
- ❑ Involve itself with the organization's day-to-day operations.
- ❑ As individual or committees, issue instructions that represent changes in fiscal, personnel, or program policies without formal action having been taken by the full board.

## Board Member Job Description

- ❑ Keep the whole thing to no more than one and one half pages.
- ❑ There's no complete boilerplate job description that you can merely insert your organization's name in. You need to develop your own.
- ❑ Here are some things that should be covered:
  - A general description of the Board's responsibility.
  - A description of how the board works.
  - A list of responsibilities of the individual board members.
  - A very specific list of the approximate time requirements of board service----how many meetings, how many hours per month, and special obligations like retreats or fundraising events.
- ❑ Use the board member job description as a tool in recruiting new board members. A good job description enables prospective members to assess realistically whether they can make the commitment your organization expects.
- ❑ Review the job description every couple of years and revise it as necessary. It is only useful insofar as it reflects reality.

## Getting and Keeping Good Board Members

- ❑ Never elect a board member who does not have an *active commitment* to the purpose of your organization. Keep the vision out front.
- ❑ *Assess annually* the particular knowledge, skills, experiences, and connections needed on the board for this stage of the organization's development.
- ❑ *Recruit constantly.* Build a pool of potential board members---prospects who have survived an initial screening. Planning ahead means

getting tentative commitments from people for board service next year, or the year after that.

- ❑ Make sure that prospective board members know exactly *what is expected* of them — and what they can expect from the organization — before you offer them a position.
- ❑ Orient new board members carefully. Be sure the President and Executive Director spend time individually with new board members after they have been elected and before their first meeting to bring them up to speed. Have board manuals ready to give to new members which includes:
  - Articles of incorporation
  - Bylaws
  - Annual budget
  - Most recent monthly financial statements
  - Minutes of the last 2-4 board meetings
  - List of board members with addresses and phone numbers
  - List of staff by function
  - Program descriptions
- ❑ Give board members *real work* to do, and give them the information and support they need to get it done.
- ❑ Run meetings well — publish agendas ahead of time, start and stop on time, keep discussion crisp and focused.

## Characteristics of Effective Boards

**Diversity.** The board as a whole contains differences in talents, skills, experience, interest, and social background.

**Structure.** The board is organized in such a way that individuals and committees assume a proper and active role in its functions.

**Member Involvement.** Members demonstrate a high degree of interest in their role and

responsibilities and are genuinely concerned about the organization's problems and prospects.

**Knowledge.** Members are well informed about the organization's operation and about the social forces that are affecting service delivery.

**Rapport.** Members of the board have mutual respect, regardless of the differences of opinion, and maintain a productive working relationship with one another and with the executive director.

**Sensitivity.** The board is representative of, and sensitive to, different constituencies and viewpoints.

**Sense of Priorities.** Board members are concerned with important and long range issues, not trivial matters.

**Direction.** The president is respected and is strong and skilled in making certain that various points of view are expressed in reaching satisfactory decisions.

**Strength.** The board is strong enough to achieve effective policy decisions.

**Financial Support.** The board contains a reasonable number of members who obtain financial support for the organization.

**Accomplishment.** The board has genuine sense of progress and achievement and members gain satisfaction from their service.

## **Some Structure Issues About Board of Directors**

**Size** — Some insist that any board more than nine members is dysfunctional. We recommend 12-18.

**Terms of Office** — No one should stay on a board forever. It usually takes more than a year for a board member to get up a full head of steam and find out how they can best contribute. We recommend staggered three-year terms, with one reelection

possible. After that, even the best board member needs to take at least a year off.

**Meetings** — We recommend monthly, or at least bimonthly meetings. It is very difficult to keep a board engaged if it meets only quarterly.

Duration is another issue. A well organized, well functioning board should be able to conduct its business in one to one and half hours, except under special circumstances. Two hours stretches the patience and attention giving capacity of most people. Three hours means the board as a whole is bogging down by doing what should be committee work.

**Committees** — Every board needs committees which should get their charges from the full board, study issues and problems, examine alternatives and come back to the board with recommendations for action. Committees also need staff support. Many boards have too many committees. Evaluate the real need areas and eliminate committees that are no longer necessary.

**Decision Makers** — Every board needs to be clear about how it will make decisions. There is no right answer, and the decision making pattern can change as the organization evolves. A founding board may need to work from consensus. A clear decision making style is helpful in making committee structures work. We recommend the board follow standard parliamentary procedures. Use *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised* as your reference.

## **References**

*The Effective Nonprofit Board: Responsibilities & Recruitment*, by Ann Lehman and Robert Zimmerman. Visit [www.mightwords.com](http://www.mightwords.com)

# **Developing an Effective Board of Directors**



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