

# Running an Effective Board

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## 1. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD

**a. Planning and policy development** – determining the mission and vision of the organization – responsive to major issues that will have significant impact on the organization and the constituents it serves.

**b. Community and organizational development** – broadening the organization's base of support in the community – training and developing current and new leaders within the board and committees – maintaining accountability to the public, funders, members.

**c. Fundraising and support development** – giving personal time and money; developing donors, members, and supporters – leading and supporting fundraising campaigns and events – maintaining accountability to donors and funders.

## 2. THE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

**a. Written Committee Description.** The description should summarize the purpose of the committee, its composition and selection procedure, and the specific duties of the committee.

**b. An effective committee chair.** The committee chair should be a board member. This helps to assure that the leadership of the committee is "in sync" with that of the Board as a whole. In seeking a chair, look for two things: content knowledge and experience relevant to the work of the committee as well as leadership and people skills. The committee chair will be responsible for preparing agendas, assigning responsibilities to committee members and follow-up to make sure assigned work is being done by members.

**c. Members thoughtfully appointed.** Each standing committee is generally composed of a core of five to eight members and can be a mix of board and non-board members. Every effort should be made to match the needs and requirements of the committee to the skills, knowledge and interests of prospective committee members. However, the individual board members should be able to select the committee assignment that they feel will best meet their needs, while at the same time, meeting the needs of the organization.

**d. Accountability to the board.** Accountability begins with a written committee description that describes what the board expects from the committee. Link the committee description with specific strategic plan elements. Develop a work plan that would contain objectives incorporating measurable outcomes for regular reporting of the committee to the board as a whole. It is important that the board clearly communicate to all of its committees what kind of reporting it expects and with what frequency.

**e. Well — run meetings.** It is important to provide for meeting space that matches the needs of the group, a written meeting agenda and any necessary information distributed to members in advance of the meeting.

**f. Education and training.** The organization and board education and training program should also be prepared to provide training to committee members to help them sharpen their skills.

### 3. BARRIERS TO BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

**Why do some boards not function effectively? Examining these barriers to board effectiveness is the first step to revitalizing an existing board or establishing a new one.**

**a. Temptation to micro-management.** It is critical that the board focuses its attention on items of critical importance to the organization. In order to do this, the board must avoid the temptation to micro-manage or meddle in lesser matters or in areas that are more appropriately handled by the committees or professional staff. A board, meeting monthly for two hours, has approximately 24 hours of meeting time per year to make all of the major decisions as well as address critical issues that come before it unannounced. It is simply impossible to do an effective job with in those 24 hours of meeting time, even if only a few hours are wasted on trivia.

**b. Ineffective Nominating Committee.** Boards need to remember that the work of the nominating committee has a lasting impact on organization. This committee's work determines who board leaders will be for many years for years into the future. The nominating committee should have a clear sense of recruiting priorities as well as expectations for individual board members especially in the area of fund-raising. If the nominating committee or board recruiting committee is well organized, board members are likely to have a good understanding of their role as board members.

**c. No Plan for Rotation.** Another problem is the lack of a plan for orderly rotation of board members on and off the board. If the same people serve year after year, there is no way for new blood and new ideas to come into the board. Despite their sense of commitment, these same people will make the organization a "closed corporation" with a possessive, self-perpetuating board. The presence of new people will bring a new perspective, promote creativity and innovation in board decision-making.

**d. Failure to remove unproductive members.** People who are not carrying out their commitments as board members become major blocks to overall board effectiveness. There needs to be a process for evaluating board member performance and making recommendations regarding their future service with the board.

**e. Too small.** Boards need enough members to lead and form the core of the committees and, in general, share in the other work of the board. They also need sufficient numbers to reflect the desired diversity in the board as well as assure the range of viewpoints that spurs innovation and creativity in board planning and decision-making.

**f. Lack of functioning committee structure.** While it is true that major decisions are made in board meetings, it is also true is that most of the work that supports and implements this decision-making occurs at the committee level. If the board has a committee structure that functions inadequately, this can lead to poor performance in general.

**g. No strategic plan.** If the organization lacks a strategic plan that provides clear direction the board can spend significant amounts of time talking about topics that simply don't matter. Boards should develop a long-range service delivery and financial development plan that will advance the strategic plan.

**h. No plan for orientation of new and old members.** Boards fail because they have no plan for orientation of new and old members; the blending of new and old board members

into a well-functioning team. Develop a formal plan for board training and education to continually upgrade the level of board skills and knowledge.

**Some of these problems will be painfully familiar. All are preventable.**

#### **4. SAMPLE BOARD MEETING PACKET**

#### **5. WRAP UP**

**a. Be selective in choosing board members.**

**b. Give teams an opportunity to evolve.** Don't micro-manage; guide them, but let them find their own legs.

**c. Keep good financial records and reports.** CPA or professional accountant on board. Quickbooks.

**d. Overcoming inertia.** Look for the symptoms. Instill confidence, dispel fear.

**e. As President** – Set the standard and lead by example.

Resources: *"Building an Effective Board of Directors"* by Frank Martinelli, The Center for Public Skills Training <http://www.createthefuture.com/Board%20of%20Directors.htm>