

Roles, Influence, and Responsibilities of a Nonprofit Board Member

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Board members know the important, but often unrecognized role the board plays. In addition to taking responsibility for the organizations legal and ethical obligations to donors, clients and the government boards shoulder the responsibility of providing guidance to the organization by managing the organization and leading others with their hands, minds and spirits. (Masaoka, 1999)

One of the important challenges that too many board members and boards have; they don't understand their roles and responsibilities. This lack of understanding of what is — and is not — a part of the board's essential roles can lead to a whole host of dysfunctions, such as micromanagement, rogue decision-making, lack of engagement, and more. (BoardSource, 2020)

There are two types of nonprofit boards: there are working boards and advisory boards. Working boards usually lead smaller, all volunteer organizations that have no paid staff i.e., a small community arts council or rescue organization. Whereas advisory boards guide organizations that have paid staff to carry out the day-to-day tasks i.e., a Credit Union, museum or library.

In all volunteer organizations (no paid staff) board members have two types of responsibilities; the first responsibility is to the nonprofit itself as in the board's corporate or governance responsibilities i.e., handle the money, file forms and keep the organization safe and legal. The second responsibility is to lead, manage and do i.e., ensures the organizations work is accomplished. In organizations with paid staff, the board members oversee that these responsibilities are completed.

Here are some guidelines for Nonprofit Board Members:

General

- Ensure that the activities of the organization support the organization's mission and the mission is carried out
- Periodically evaluate board members: be open to self-evaluation
- Adopt a written code of ethics which all board members sign and adhere to
- Advisory board members do not manage the day to day affairs of an organization while working board members ensure the work of the organization is accomplished.

Individual

To demonstrate a personal stake in the organization board members must:

- Be committed to the mission and success of the organization
- Expect to volunteer time
- Help raise external funds when necessary
- Make personal financial contributions to the organization when necessary
- Support and evaluate the Chief Executive with the goals of the organization in mind
- Explore challenging issues with staff members and encourage their creativity

- Get to know and trust staff
- Treat each other respectfully
- Avoid public criticism of each other: it only makes for martyrs

Bylaws, Mission Statement, Goals and Objectives, and Policies

- Review these four at least every other year
- To ensure that administrative policies, practices and procedures are in place
- To ensure controllership policies, practices and procedures are in place to implement the decisions of the Board

Role and Influence

- The most important single responsibility of a board member is participation at board meetings
- Board members' duties are to be performed, almost without exception, by the board as a whole
- As individuals, board members have no administrative authority (There are some exceptions) An example is working board members who administer programs under direction of the full board or an advisory board which gives individual board members authority to administer a program
- Board members should devote their official time to problems of basic policy and act as liaisons between the organization and the general public
- Represent to the public and to consider the well-being and best interests of the organization
- Develop and evaluate the policies and programs of the organization
- Determine which services the organization provides
- Maintain the financial integrity of the organization
- Assess the qualifications and appoint the organization's board members
- Recruit, hire and appoint administrative personnel

- Protect the welfare of the organization and its members
- Provide community leadership
- To ensure the accountability and transparency of the organization's operations, including the activities of the senior administration of the organization

References

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