

Board Expectations: What Nonprofits Need from Board Members

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What Nonprofits Need

- Commitment to Mission
- Capacity to Give
- Skills, Knowledge, Abilities
- Connections
- Independence

Commitment to Mission

1. Mission

Do you know the organization's mission? What is its goal, reason for being? Can you embrace it?

2. Vision

Do you know where the organization is headed? How it intends to get there? Are you willing to help it get there?

3. Values

What are the organization's values? Do you share them?

Commitment to Mission

Where does commitment to mission come from?

- Shared values
- Increasing knowledge about mission & activities of organization
- Depth learning about organization & its place in the community:
 - What it does
 - Who it serves
- Developed through following organization in media, making site visits, participation in events & programming, etc.

Capacity to Give

- Time, talent, treasure
- Wealth, wisdom, work
- All board members must give as they are able
 - Financially, \$5 or \$5,000
 - Money isn't everything!
 - Time—to prepare for and attend meetings, committee work, to participate in events, fundraisers and other activities
 - Work—especially important for the “hands-on” board
 - Signing fundraising letters, maybe even stuffing them!
 - Asking for gifts
 - “Burning the midnight oil” when an issue is pressing

Skills

Nonprofits need skilled board members

- Math, financial, bookkeeping, budgeting, Excel
- Communications—verbal, writing, social media
- Business development
- Planning, events, fundraising
- Technical—computers, networks, software

Knowledge

Subject matter expertise; for example:

- For a child care center, knowledge of early childhood education, nutrition, psychology, etc.
- For an animal shelter, knowledge of issues like spay/neuter; ferals; rescue strategies; legal
- Nonprofit environment
- Business / industry

Knowledge

All organizations need certain types of knowledge; for example:

- Financial
- Planning
- Risk management
- Human resources
- Community
- Industry

Abilities

- Leadership
- Analytical thinking
- Persuasion
- Learning orientation
- “Big picture” / “little picture” perspective
- Open-mindedness, objectivity
- Articulate communicator

Connections

- Networks & contacts
 - Colleagues
 - Politicians
 - Funders
 - Donors
 - Media
- Who do you know well enough to ask for:
 - Gifts (financial or in-kind)?
 - Help?
 - Entrée?
- Willingness to use networks to recruit new board members, donors, and others to the organization

Independence

Nonprofits need unconflicted board members—that is, directors who:

- Act only in best interests of this organization
- Do not represent any other entity's interests
- Receive no personal benefit from this organization
- Are not employees of this organization
- Are not deeply involved in this organization on a day-to-day level
- Are not closely involved with founder

Independence

- IRS and funders prefer boards consisting primarily of independent directors.
- Boards of tax-exempt organizations are expected to have conflict of interest policies and procedures in place. Policies should:
 - Require disclosure of actual, potential, or apparent conflicts.
 - Require a conflicted director's absence from any deliberations related to the conflicted transaction.
- Transparency is a key value for tax-exempt organizations.

How to be a great board member

Great board members embrace their duties as directors:

- Duty of Care—taking such care of the nonprofit as “an ordinarily prudent person in a like position” would.
- Duty of Loyalty—acting in good faith and in the best interests of the nonprofit.
- Directors carry out their duties by their attendance, preparation, participation and engagement with the nonprofit.

How to be a great board member

- Attend all meetings, well-prepared and punctual.
 - Do pre-meeting homework:
 - Study agenda & meeting materials
 - Do whatever prep required to be fully informed on agenda items
 - Require complete information before decision-making
 - If info & background haven't been provided ask for it, deferring decision until received.
 - Do the analysis, ask the questions
- Disclose conflicts as soon as detected (and be on the lookout for them.)

How to be a great board member

- Think things through; “speak with brain engaged”.
- Think independently
 - Ask the hard questions
 - If you don’t have enough information, ask for it
 - Don’t follow the pack unless you arrive at the pack’s place through your own analysis.
 - Don’t be afraid to vote “no”.
- Seek training; many resources available to support and assist nonprofit board members.

How to be a great board member

- Lead
 - Be strategic
 - Live as much as possible at the policy level
 - Don't wallow in details
 - Leave operations to staff, if there is staff.
- Demonstrate commitment to the organization
 - Participate in the life of the organization
 - Be an ambassador of the organization
 - Give, financially or in-kind

Resources

- ***Guide for Board Members of Charitable Organizations***, Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, available at:
<http://www.mass.gov/ago/docs/nonprofit/guide-for-board-members.pdf>
- ***Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice***, Independent Sector, available at:
http://www.hewlett.org/uploads/files/Principles_Guide.pdf
- ***Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards***, BoardSource; see <http://www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Nonprofit-Boards/Nonprofit-Boards-101/Basic-Responsibilities-Nonprofit-Boards.aspx>

Resources

- ***National Council of Nonprofits***

<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org>

- ***Independent Sector***

<https://www.independentsector.org/>

- ***Board Source***

<https://www.boardsource.org/eweb/>

Upcoming Programs

Saturday Seminars!

October 17, 9:00-1:00 -- Starting the Nonprofit: What to know before you start

November 14, 9:00-1:00 -- Starting the Nonprofit-Part 2: The Nuts & Bolts

- **Lunch** will be provided.
- \$20 per person per session. Attend one or both.
- **Pre-register by 5:00 pm on Thursday, October 15 for the first session; by Thursday, November 12, for the second session.** You **MUST** preregister for these sessions by 5:00 pm on the Thursday before.