

Board Members of Nonprofits Have Important Responsibilities

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As the nonprofit sector has grown to accommodate a wide range of voluntary endeavors, millions of people have been given an opportunity to serve on the boards of nonprofit organizations. Serving as a board member is one of the most challenging and rewarding volunteer experiences.

An effective decision-making board can strengthen a nonprofit organization in many different ways: perform some of the tasks of the organization, support the organization's work in the community, bring necessary resources for better performance, advise the organization on legal or other matters and help with fund raising.

While appointment or election to a board is an honor, board members have important duties and responsibilities requiring time commitment, particular skills, talents and resources. The responsibilities fall into five fundamental areas.

Establishing the Organization's Mission, Vision and Direction

Every nonprofit organization needs to have a clear and agreed upon mission statement. Board members should invest their time and energy in developing mission and vision statements.

The mission is the fundamental statement of why the organization exists, the style in which it will operate, the community it will serve and the variety of people who are its members. Peter Drucker says, "The mission is: Why you do what you do, the organization's reason for being its purpose. It says what, in the end, you want to be remembered for."

While the mission statement describes why your organization exists and what you are doing, the vision statement describes the future of your organization: where you are

going and where you want to go — your long-term organization intent. Initially, the vision statement is a dream with the right plan, personnel, commitment and implementation, can come to reality.

According to Jerry Cronin in "Organizational Mission and Values" (1985), the well-developed mission and vision statements will have the following benefits:

- Enable the board to define the "business of the organization" so all of its energy can be spent in pursuit of compatible results.
- Enable to define funding sources compatible with the mission of the organization.
- Enable the board to decide how to spend resources so budgets can be tied to the most critical results the organization wants to achieve.
- Suggests to the board the kinds of skills it must have or recruit to be effective in daily operations.
- Enable the board to make decisions about which programs and projects to undertake and which to avoid.
- Enable the organization to develop its planning with action steps.

A side benefit of developing mission and vision statements is the process of development. It will cause the board members to begin to form closer bonds, share expectations about the future of their organization and understand the differences in points of view among board members. Such differences may well explain weak support and commitment of some board members. These differences may be resolved as mission/vision statements are developed and the board members have internalized the statements.

Ensuring the Financial Sustainability of the Organization

As a rule, nonprofit organizations face financial vulnerability. The board is responsible

for the availability of adequate financial resources for the work of the organization. Boards are often thought to have only policymaking responsibility; however, board responsibilities are much broader.

In terms of financial management, the board should consider the following financial responsibilities to the organization:

- Approving and developing the annual budget.
- Developing financial controls and procedures.
- Establishing and monitoring financial record keeping system.
- Ensuring financial reporting systems are in place.
- Monitoring revenue and expenditures of the organization.

In order to insure there are adequate financial resources, the board may be involved in planning fundraising campaigns by:

- Establishing fund-raising targets, based on the needs of the organization.
- Developing fund-raising goals, objectives and action steps.
- Recruiting champions and volunteers.

Financial management, however, should not be considered an end in itself. It is really a tool, means, for accomplishing the program priorities set by the board and organization's management; when implemented well, it strengthens the overall ability of the organization to meet its mission and vision goals.

Ensuring the Existence of Sufficient and Appropriate Human Resources

The board is the legal employer of all staff and is responsible for the working conditions in the organization. Accordingly, the board should understand its responsibility as an employer and develop all the necessary tools for effective management of its employees and volunteers:

- Appropriate personnel policies

have been adopted by the board and are followed by the management.

- There is a position classification and salary schedule policy for the organization.
- Affirmative action and non-discrimination policies have been adopted and enforced throughout the organization.
- A current job description exists for each position.
- Appropriate training is obtained for staff on a regular basis.
- Appropriate use is made of volunteers.
- All personnel are evaluated at least annually.

Supervising Organizational Operations

One of the most neglected aspects of the board's roles is overseeing organizational operations. This is accomplished by meeting the legal requirements of the organization, monitoring and evaluating of the organization's performance and personnel, and ensuring the board itself works effectively. The board's roles in the oversight of organizational operations are:

- Establishing board policies on evaluation and oversight.
- Design of assessment and monitoring system.
- Achieving early problem recognition.
- Being proactive and anticipating problems.
- Ensuring the utilization of information from the assessment for program and organizational improvement.

As well, a basic responsibility of the board is to ensure its own renewal and development. The board development cycle illustrated below is one way of describing the key steps in the process:

- Developing a board profile.
- Recruiting and selecting new members.
- Election and re-election of board officers.
- Orientation for new board members.
- Ongoing support and recognition.

- Training and development.

Ensuring Effective Community Relations

Effective public relations can give an organization visibility and connections in the community, and can provide community support for the activities of the organization. One of the major goals of any public relations effort for a nonprofit organization is the organization's ability to attract voluntary support. There is not a nonprofit organization in existence that does not need volunteers, their skills, time and efforts.

The effective community relations of any nonprofit organization begin with development of the board. Board members are selected for their particular interest in the organization and their ability to positively influence others in the community.

Boards need to ensure they are responding effectively and efficiently to the changing needs in their community. Developing marketing and public relations strategies to promote awareness of the organization in the community is essential. Boards are also becoming more involved in collaborative efforts with other organizations.

- The board should ensure:
- The community is aware of the mission/vision of the organization.
 - There is agency representation in the community, with government and other funding agencies.
 - The membership receives information on programs and services.
 - There are clear principles and objectives to guide any collaboration with other agencies.
 - An awareness of the organization is developed in the community.

Sources:

- *The Nonprofit Board Book: Strategies for Organizational Success*; Independent Community Consultants, 1985; <http://www.boarddevelopment.org>
- *Board Development*; <http://ctb.ku.edu/tools>
- *Community Tool Box*

Community CROPS Seeks Executive Director

Community CROPS (Combining Resources, People, and Opportunities for Sustainability) is looking for Executive Director who will manage the project and coordinate the work of community gardeners. Assist with training, facilitate workshops and events, recruit community gardeners, cultivate and build support for the project. Serve as liaison among project participants, project partners and community. This is a grant-funded position requiring monthly reports to Advisory Committee.

Bachelor's in horticulture, agriculture, business administration, leadership development, urban planning/community development, education or related field, plus experience with working culturally diverse population. Flexibility and demonstrated leadership/problem-solving skills are necessary. Strong communication and organizational skills are essential. Travel and some evening/weekend work required; must have a valid driver license.

Submit cover letter and resume to Yelena Mitrofanova, Cooperative Extension, 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE 68528. Review of resumes will begin June 6 until position is filled.

This Nebraska Student Hails the Husker Experience

Jill Wieskamp, a junior majoring in Spanish and secondary education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a Norris High graduate, lives - and loves - the Nebraska experience. She is involved in her sorority, she's a leader in the Navigators program, she works on campus, and she even studied abroad in Spain last summer. A future teacher, Wieskamp is learning every chance she gets. "It's a big campus involved - you can't help but activity that fits you. And like till you're here - every experience is different."

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