The importance of nonprofit leadership

From crafting mission and vision statements to establishing a board of directors

As the name states, the mission of nonprofit organizations usually centers around selfless concern for the well-being of others rather than turning the largest profit possible.

In this guide, we will discuss how strong executive leadership can play a large role in the success of a nonprofit.
To lead

By Melanie Herman, Executive Director, Nonprofit Risk Management Center

I am blessed to both work with and witness the work of many great leaders. Few days go by when I don’t learn from a member of my own board, from colleagues with whom I sit on other boards, or from members of the management teams and boards I have the privilege of advising. With three different lenses through which to see leadership in action, I’m grateful for what feels like a kaleidoscopic view. Reflecting on what I have experienced in recent weeks, I wanted to share a personal take on what it means to lead.

Leadership means:

• Inviting feedback on your toughest decisions — knowing full well that some of that feedback will be critical

• Having the courage to be transparent about the decisions you make as a leader

• Never believing that you are the smartest person in the room, and entering every boardroom eager to learn from others

• Bringing your toughest questions, rather than your brilliant solutions, to discussions with other leaders you trust and respect

• Being truly humble by living up to your commitments

• Learning to disagree without being disagreeable

• Being on the lookout for emerging leaders who can take your place, take the baton or add strength, talent or a contrary point of view to the ranks

• Recognizing when it’s time to step away or step down and leave an organization you love in the trusted care of others

• Always treating peers, partners, direct reports, volunteers and donors in the manner you wish to be treated in return

The Nonprofit Risk Management Center (NRMC) provides risk management advice to the nonprofit sector. Learn more.
Vision and mission statements

Every company — especially a nonprofit — needs both vision and mission statements. These statements are more than just for display on your website; they should be the cornerstones of your brand and strategy, known not just by your customers and donors but also by your employees and volunteers.

The best vision and mission statements inspire and guide while effectively communicating what makes your organization different from all others. But what are these statements, and what’s the difference between vision and mission?

**Vision statement** — Declares what your organization strives to accomplish in the long term. It focuses on the future and describes the ideal state of not only your organization but of the world.

**Mission statement** — States what your organization does every day, in the near term, to serve its purpose. More tangible than the vision statement, it specifically defines the customers, processes, products and performance goals that make your company unique. In short, it is your brand positioning.

Creating new vision or mission statements (or updating existing ones) is a collaborative process that should involve every possible affected stakeholder: your executives, board, donors and funders, staff members and the community you serve.

According to Nonprofit Hub, a good mission statement at least implies the following three elements:

1. **A cause or who you serve.** What matters, and who is most important to you?
2. **An action.** What specific activities are you engaging in to fulfill this mission?
3. **A result.** What specific benefit to society or your customers will you achieve?

Your mission statement is only as good as your organization’s willingness to bring it to life. It’s up to you to keep your staff and volunteers motivated and up to date on organizational goals. Learn more about writing an effective mission statement for your nonprofit organization.

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Vision and mission statements (cont.)

Nonprofit Hub also provides a helpful chart of simple attributes that can separate an effective mission statement from a meaningless one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Meaningless</th>
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<tr>
<td>Uses language your constituents use</td>
<td>Uses jargon, doesn’t understand your audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is emotionally stirring</td>
<td>Is logical and cold</td>
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<td>Communicates the “why”</td>
<td>Communicates only the “what” or “how”</td>
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<td>Is concise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is a single, powerful sentence</td>
<td>Is a rambling paragraph</td>
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<td>Sounds good spoken out loud</td>
<td>Is full of clauses and hard to say</td>
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<td>Is memorable</td>
<td>Is forgettable</td>
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<td>Surprises</td>
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<td>Is actionable</td>
<td>Can’t be quantified</td>
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<td>Is specific</td>
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You must work hard to keep staff members and volunteers on a clear path to bringing the organization’s mission statement to life. Learn more about sowing your company’s mission from the top down.
Executive leadership

A great nonprofit executive needs more than just business acumen and basic leadership senses. Below are some qualities that are crucial to the leaders of successful nonprofits, according to MissionBox.²

1. Passion: Passion not only for the organization but for its cause and the population it serves. Above all, executives should be genuinely invested in the organization’s mission.

2. Magnetism: Good nonprofit leaders must be able to attract those people and assets that are most beneficial to the organization’s mission.

3. Capability: More than any other type of company, nonprofits require their leaders to be innovative, resourceful and efficient. The mission is most important, but a good financial steward is needed to ensure the vision is fulfilled.

4. Steadfastness: Crises should be rare, but at nonprofits they can take on a uniquely emotional or difficult tone. Executives must be able to navigate these tumultuous times smoothly and confidently.

5. Experience to back up knowledge: One of the fastest ways to gain legitimacy as a nonprofit executive is to have — and to gain — experience fundraising, networking, negotiating and managing.

Read more about important leadership qualities to demonstrate in a nonprofit organization.

The NRMC maintains that executives at nonprofits have the added responsibility of working with and reporting to a board of directors. Here are some of NRMC’s tips for keeping that relationship positive:

- **Have a constructive partnership.** The CEO and board must understand and appreciate that they are interdependent and share responsibility.

- **Set clear expectations.** The roles of the board and CEO should be clear and well understood. Some responsibilities should be the CEO’s, some should be the board’s and some should be shared. The key is to make sure that everyone knows his or her role.

- **Think strategically.** Time should be set aside at board meetings to get away from monotonous operational topics and discuss strategy.

- **Be candid.** Difficult topics should not be ignored; the CEO and board must be transparent and honest with each other. Uncomfortable conversations can be the most constructive ones.

Learn more about the NRMC’s advice on board-CEO relationships.
Executive leadership (cont.)

Succession planning is more than just picking executives-in-waiting. In fact, the NRMC discourages that strategy. Instead, it suggests a more holistic succession planning process aimed at carefully planning for the departure of executives and developing a strategy for selecting new ones. Such a strategy, the NRMC argues, is more sustainable, healthier and less risky than simply selecting an understudy.4

Let’s take the CEO as an example. Even before a good succession plan can be created, the NRMC recommends several key ongoing activities that will make the transition, when it does occur, as easy as possible:

- ** Adopt a CEO performance assessment process.** This is typically conducted by a board committee and often takes the form of an annual review.
- ** Clarify backup personnel for key responsibilities.** This mitigates the potential drop-off caused by a sudden or planned departure by the executive.

Five steps of CEO succession planning

1. **Assign responsibility for developing and executing the plan to a board committee:** If an appropriate committee doesn’t already exist, create one. The responsibility should not fall on the CEO.

2. **Focus on the position rather than the person:** Don’t just select a replacement-in-waiting. A good succession plan is far more than just choosing a successor.

3. **Determine an appropriate timeline:** Base it on the board’s meeting frequency and experience with executive transitions.

4. **Keep the board in the loop:** The plan should be developed by a committee, but the entire board should have an opportunity to provide feedback.

5. **Disseminate the plan:** The plan should be widely communicated and easily available. New board members should be briefed on the plan during onboarding.

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4 “Avoid Transition Trauma with a CEO Succession Plan,” Melanie Lockwood Herman and Erin Gloeckner for NRMC, nonprofitrisk.org/resources/articles/ceo-succession-planning/ (accessed April 2, 2019).
Board members are the fiduciaries who steer the organization toward a sustainable future by adopting sound, ethical and legal governance, and financial management policies, as well as by making sure the nonprofit has adequate resources to advance its mission.

Ultimately, the Board of Directors is responsible for the bulk of what keeps your nonprofit organization going. First and foremost, it is directly responsible for developing the mission and for seeing that it is carried out effectively. This includes strategic planning, raising funds and seeing that these funds are used by the staff in ways that are best for the organization and for the cause.5

It’s important that the board always aims to make decisions based on what’s best for the organization. Even when members don’t see eye to eye on certain issues, compromises must be made with respect to common goals.

Critical board responsibilities include:

• Selecting and hiring new executive officers, determining their compensation and onboarding them; officers report to the board, so the board must continually evaluate their success
• Ensuring legal compliance, with the help of a general counsel, for all organizational activities
• Monitoring and auditing financial performance and expense management
• Overseeing fundraising
• Setting budgets

Committees are formed around specific topics so that all board members do not need to be involved in every area of the company. Typically, board members will each serve on one or two committees, ideally in areas in which they have expertise.

Often, a smaller executive committee is established to act on behalf of the board in between board meetings. This is typically composed of board officers and committee chairs. Another common committee is the nominating committee, which plans for board member successions.

*Board of directors (cont.)*

Bylaws, sometimes referred to as a Code of Regulations, are the rules that govern all aspects of nonprofit board administration and ensure that operations are as smooth, compliant and peaceful as possible. They guide the board’s decisions and can prevent potential problems such as misunderstandings or abuses of power.

Bylaws should be among the first things agreed upon by a new nonprofit board; operating without them opens the organization to unnecessary risks. State-specific bylaw requirements exist and can be obtained from your state’s secretary of state or attorney general. Bylaws should be reviewed regularly and should be sufficiently communicated and accessible.

According to the widely cited resource BoardSource, these are some standard features for nonprofit governance.6

**General items to include in your organization’s bylaws:**

1. The organization’s name and location
2. A statement of purpose
3. Election, roles and terms of board members and officers
4. Meeting policies and frequency
5. Board structure, including size and committee roles
6. Membership issues, including categories and responsibilities
7. Board member compensation
8. CEO role description
9. Bylaw amendment procedure
10. Organization dissolution procedures

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6 [https://boardsource.org/resources/bylaws/](https://boardsource.org/resources/bylaws/)
Below are some considerations for building, structuring and maintaining a sound board of directors.

**Committees:** The board may feature both standing and temporary committees to handle ongoing needs and specific issues at hand, respectively. The committees should be led by the appropriate board members based on skill, experience and expertise. Any board member should refrain from being on more than one or two committees so as not to divide their attention over too many important areas. If there are not enough board members to support all committees, consider increasing the size of the board, and look for a potential member whose expertise is lacking within the current board.

Common standing committees include an executive committee, a finance committee, a board development and governance committee, a fundraising committee and a marketing committee. Temporary committees will depend on specific organizational needs and projects as they come along.

**Officer positions:** The board should have a chairman, who presides over the board’s work overall and works with the organization’s executive director or CEO to ensure that the necessary actions are taken to achieve the board’s goals. There should also be a vice chairman to fill in for the chair when needed and to take care of matters assigned by the chairman. A secretary should be appointed as well.

**Term length:** Board member term length and limit should be faithfully enforced. On this topic, BoardSource has some advice: “There are no hard and fast rules for determining board members’ tenure. Many organizations do, however, limit members to two consecutive terms and might require a hiatus of one year before a board member may be reappointed.”
Succession planning: The procedure for selecting and recruiting new board members should be established and well understood by the entirety of your nonprofit’s governing body. As with executives, board succession planning should be a static procedure followed at regular intervals throughout the life of an organization, each time a board member’s term reaches its scheduled conclusion. Most boards have a nominating committee to carry out this process.

In some ways, recruiting board members is like recruiting for any other position. You’ll want to assess the candidates’ skills, experience and personality. You can look to your existing group of volunteers and staff members to determine whether there is someone qualified.

Consider donors. Also, chances are that current staff members each have people in mind for consideration, so be sure all of these options are explored.

Diversity is important as you look for new members. The board should reflect your organization and its base as a whole. Having a board of varying sexes, races, sexual preferences and religions will bring a variety of perspectives to the organization, which can benefit your efforts and support.

Read more on:
- Considerations when building a Board of Directors.
- How to structure a board of directors.
- Finding and recruiting board members.
Leadership terms to know

Below is a selection of intermediate leadership terms from BoardSource that might be useful as you govern your nonprofit. Read BoardSource’s complete glossary.

Ad hoc committee — A temporary committee established to address a specific issue, not necessarily within a specific time frame.

Advisory council — A group created to advise and support an organization or its leadership.

Board development — A process of building effective boards, from recruiting and orienting to engaging and educating board members; also includes rotations of board members to ensure a good fit with the organization’s governance needs.

Board member agreement — A verbal or written statement of commitment to fulfill responsibilities as outlined in the board member job description.

Bylaws — The legal operating guidelines for a board.

Chair — In a nonprofit organization, the chief volunteer position; the elected leader of the board.

Duty of care — Requirement that board members be reasonably informed about the organization’s activities, participate in decisions and do so in good faith and with the care of an ordinarily prudent person in similar circumstances.

Executive committee — A committee that has specific powers, outlined in the bylaws, which allow it to act on the board’s behalf when a full board meeting is not possible or necessary.

Governance committee — A committee responsible for recruiting, orienting and training board members; may also be responsible for periodic bylaw reviews.

Indemnification — A guarantee by an organization to pay board members’ legal costs for claims that result from board service.

Membership organization — A nonprofit that grants its members specific rights to participate in its internal affairs and/or to receive certain benefits in return for payment of membership dues.

Leadership terms to know (cont.)

Retreat — An event at which the board or staff members meet to learn about or explore specific issues; examples include strategic planning, orientation or self-assessment; it is usually longer than a regular meeting, often off-site and informal in nature.

Secretary — An officer position that involves taking minutes and keeping records and archives of the board; duties are often delegated to staff.

Staggered terms — An organizational structure in which board members’ terms expire in alternating years.

Treasurer — A board officer position that is responsible for coordinating and ensuring financial oversight of the organization.

Vice chair — A board officer whose main duty is to replace the chair when the chair is not able to carry out his or her duties; this may or may not imply the position as chair-elect.
Writing a vision and mission statement for a nonprofit

Vision and mission statements are important parts of establishing your nonprofit’s brand and its plans for the present as well as the future. They can be key components for getting your message across and ultimately for gaining donations. Both should be clear and concise, as well as inspiring, while separating yours from other organizations that may be perceived as similar.

A vision statement is a brief description of what your organization hopes to accomplish in the long term. It is just what it sounds like. It states the vision for your nonprofit. A mission statement, however, is about the here and now. While also brief, it states the mission you hope to accomplish during the present. Both the vision and mission statement should guide the decisions you make on behalf of your organization, and both essentially sum up your objectives.

As Diffen puts it, “The Mission Statement concentrates on the present; it defines the customer(s), critical processes and it informs you about the desired level of performance.” The Vision Statement focuses on the future; it is a source of inspiration and motivation. Often it describes not just the future of the organization but the future of the industry or society in which the organization hopes to effect change.”

When writing both statements, brevity is key. Many organizations put too many words into them, and their messages become diluted. The fact is that the top nonprofits all keep them short and sweet.

TopNonprofits.com looked at the mission statements of the top 100 nonprofits based on “a series of web, social, and financial metric,” and found that the average length for the top 20 is only 9.5 words (excluding brand references). The shortest — TED — used only two words, and the longest (UNHCR) used 235 words. TED’s is simply “Spreading ideas,” while UNHCR is composed of five paragraphs.

If your efforts come out more on the UNHCR side of things, consider revising it down until you can cut it to 20 words or less. Usually, the shorter it is, the more memorable it will be, and that can help a great deal when it comes to brand recognition and remembrance. The average length for the top 15 organizations’ vision statements is 10.5 words (excluding brand references). There are no hard rules on what to include in your mission/vision statements, but making them stand out on your website in a visually pleasing fashion is advised.

When writing a vision statement, it is best to make it about goals you’re confident that you’ll always hope to achieve as it’s not usually a good idea to make many changes to the text as time goes on — especially if donors are happy and fundraising is good. Donors may look at this vision as a significant factor in contributing to your organization over another one, and changes in it may create issues.

As you’re putting together your own mission and vision statements, take some time to look at those from other organizations. Analyze what does and doesn’t work about them. In the end, however, your statements should be all your own and truly reflect your own goals.

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Instilling your company’s mission from the top down

Your mission statement is only as good as the organization’s willingness to bring it to life, and you must work hard to keep staff members and volunteers on a clear path to doing just that. They’ve already joined the cause by becoming part of your organization, so, hopefully, the passion and desire to carry out its goals are there. But even if they have the best of intentions, that doesn’t mean they necessarily know the best ways to get the job done. As the leader, you must provide guidance and excite the troops.

For starters, whenever someone new comes on, whether they’re a paid worker or a part-time volunteer, make sure to discuss the organization’s mission in as much detail as possible, but also give the simplest version of the mission statement and ask them to keep that top of mind at all times. Remember, brevity is key when it comes to the mission statement. Tell them that if they take one thing away from your discussion, that concise mission statement should be it.

Making this clear when someone joins the organization doesn’t mean they won’t need reminders. Discuss the mission and vision during regularly scheduled meetings and at other appropriate times. This will ensure that the key mission is not forgotten as day-to-day operations become the focus. Make it interesting, adding examples of activities that occurred recently as part of your mission and vision statement.

Karen Codere at Insperity comments on how it’s important to utilize the trickle-down effect. While she discusses the subject from the for-profit business perspective, the same logic applies here. “Senior leaders are your keepers of the baton,” she says. “They must be accountable for making sure that employees’ work continues to support the mission and vision day after day. As it trickles down, the accounting team’s part will be different than the service team’s part. However, each team needs to know what their share is and why it’s important so they can make appropriate decisions.”

At the individual employee/volunteer level, have managers conduct one-on-one meetings, and assess what are realistic goals for each person. As long as you can count on management to keep the mission in mind, they can help steer lower-level workers in the right direction on a regular basis.

It can help to inspire employees. Provide regular updates about how the mission is going, especially the accomplishments and meaningful effects of the work being done. If your organization is making a real difference, staff members will want to know that. This can inspire them to keep pushing forward. Reward individuals for outstanding performance.

Finally, simply make the mission statement visible everywhere possible. Hang posters on the walls. Include it in email signatures and on memo pads. Always have it around as a visual reminder of what your organization is all about and what it plans to accomplish.

Important leadership qualities for nonprofits

There are numerous leadership qualities that are ideal for an executive running a nonprofit organization. Perhaps first and foremost is passion. Passion for the cause at hand.

Passion means caring a great deal about the cause and being willing to put in the hard work because it's something of genuine interest. A leader who is passionate about the cause is one who will be willing to do what it takes to work toward the vision.

A self-starting quality is equally important because even if the passion is there, you must be willing to take charge and do what it takes to move the needle without being told what to do. You must have the drive.

A motivational quality is another great asset in a leader because no matter how passionate and self-starting you are, you can't do it all alone. You'll need to rally the troops and motivate people to donate money to make a bigger impact.

As important as passion is, much of the work revolves around money. This is why financial expertise is another fantastic quality for a nonprofit leader to have. It's not absolutely crucial if you have others on staff who are more qualified in this department, but a stronger financial mind at the helm is never a bad thing.

The same goes for marketing skills. As a nonprofit, you're constantly trying to spread awareness, and doing so with a smaller budget than a for-profit company. The more you understand about how marketing, both offline and online, works, the better you'll be set up for success in spreading the word about your organization.

Persistence, determination and stamina are all required. Raising money for a nonprofit cause and applying funds raised in meaningful ways are not easy. You'll need qualities that help you to keep at it, even when things are tough. When funding is down, the leadership of being able to accomplish a lot with less will also be of major help.

A strong leader needs to step up in times of crisis and show the board and staff that they can overcome the obstacles facing them.

A good leader attracts strong, qualified staff and works hard to keep them and help them move up within the organization.

Having experience working with nonprofits is good on a preparatory level. Understanding how this world operates can help you make better decisions based on what you've already learned working for another organization.

The value of more "human" qualities cannot be understated. Listening skills, emotional intelligence, empathy, and the ability to build relationships and work well with others all have a tremendous impact on the ability of your organization to effectively carry out its important mission.
The importance and responsibilities of a board

Ultimately, the Board of Directors is responsible for the bulk of what keeps your nonprofit organization going. First and foremost, it is directly responsible for developing the mission and for seeing that it is carried out effectively. This includes strategic planning, raising funds, and seeing that these funds are used by the staff in ways that are best for the organization and for the cause.

“Board members are the fiduciaries who steer the organization toward a sustainable future by adopting sound, ethical, and legal governance and financial management policies, as well as by making sure the nonprofit has adequate resources to advance its mission,”¹ says the National Council of Nonprofits.

It’s important that the board always aims to make decisions based on what’s best for the organization. Even when members don’t see eye to eye on certain issues, compromises must be made with respect to common goals.

The board is responsible for hiring the chief executive/executive director who will oversee operations, while also determining the compensation for this executive. The board must support the CEO/director but also hold them — and other board members — accountable. The same goes for other board members.

Usually there is an Executive Committee which acts on behalf of the board between board meetings. The committee is usually composed of the board officers and the committee chairs.

The board ensures that assets are used prudently. It must monitor and evaluate all programs to determine that they are spending money wisely and are effective. Otherwise, the board must determine what changes need to be made.

The board, with the help of the general counsel, ensures that all activities are legal, including the organization’s own bylaws, and adhere to any applicable regulations. General ethics must also be considered.

It is the board’s duty to oversee fundraising such as members’ dues, and also to set budgets and financial controls. Agendas are to be overseen by the board so members are always aware of all measures being taken. Strong communication on board actions is important. Good public relations has the responsibility of maintaining the organization’s public image.

Board members each serve on one or two committees, which sets policy for the staff to implement.

“There isn’t time for the board to have lengthy discussions or get involved in researching issues in detail,”² says Jeremy Barlow at BoardEffect. “Every board member should serve on a committee to steer the committee toward the information that the board needs. Committees should be structured with a chair, and possibly a co-chair, and involve input from all committee members. Committees give full recommendations and results to the full board and make themselves available to answer questions about their findings.”

Finally, the nominating committee plans for board member successors. Board positions should not be permanent, and when the time comes for change, there should be a plan that the rest of the board agrees with.

Finding and recruiting board members

Finding the right members for your organization is critical. The board helps ensure the success of your organization, so if the right people aren’t part of it, the nonprofit is going to have a difficult time fulfilling its mission and vision.

Board members must be qualified as well as passionate about the organization’s cause, and they must be willing to become advocates. All of the responsibilities that the board must contend with require numerous skill sets, and finding the right mix of people and talent is key to a successful board. Consider how individual members can bring something unique to the table.

“The recruitment process requires both ‘vetting’ a candidate and ‘cultivating’ the interest of a potential future board member until he or she is ready to accept an invitation to become an ambassador and advocate for the nonprofit,” says the National Council of Nonprofits. “Some nonprofits find that asking potential board candidates to first serve on a committee or task force, or volunteer for the nonprofit in another way, is a good way for both nonprofit and potential board member to find a good fit.”

The board can create a nominating committee specifically for finding new board members. This committee would be responsible for identifying prospective members, meeting with them and courting the desired candidates. Then their recommendations must be approved by the board.

In some ways, recruiting board members is like recruiting for any other position. You’ll want to assess the candidates’ skills, experience and personality. You can look to your existing group of volunteers and staff members to determine whether there is someone qualified. Consider donors. Current staff members probably have people in mind for consideration, so be sure all of these options are explored.

Sample various recruiting tools available to you online. Use ads and your website to invite people to apply. Use your newsletter to get the word out to your donors at networking and use these opportunities to meet potential candidates.

Diversity is important as you look for new members. The board should reflect your organization and its base as a whole. Having a board of varying sexes, races, sexual preferences and religions will bring a variety of perspectives to the organization, which can benefit your efforts and support.

How to structure a board of directors

The structure of a board of directors can be a major factor in whether it carries out its responsibilities in the most efficient way possible. As board members come and go, having a solid structure in place can make these transitions work more smoothly and minimize slowdowns in progress. It is up to the board itself to organize a structure that makes the most sense and creates a valuable working arrangement. With a solid structure in place, day-to-day operations, schedules, agendas, meetings and fundraising efforts will be easier to manage.

The structure of the organization should play a role in the board of directors, as should the organization’s needs. There must be enough board members to cover the range of knowledge and expertise needed to formulate the organization’s mission and vision, but few enough that each member has a clear purpose.

The board oversees the executive director or CEO, provides strategic direction and mission, and votes on critical issues for your organization.

“When it comes to member terms,” BoardSource says, “There are no hard and fast rules for determining board members’ tenure.1 Many organizations do, however, limit members to two consecutive terms and might require a hiatus of one year before a board member may be reappointed. Many organizations also stagger terms of service so that one-half or one-third of the board is elected every one or two years for terms of two to four years. Such policies encourage institutional renewal because a board can profit from the experience of veteran board members while welcoming the fresh perspective that new members offer.”

While the full board must be involved with actions taken by the organization, different areas of work are typically separated into committees. Each committee may be headed by a specific board member.

The board may feature both standing and temporary committees to handle ongoing needs and specific issues at hand, respectively. The committees should be led by the appropriate board members based on skill, experience and expertise. Board members should not be on more than one or two committees so as not to spread themselves too thin. If there are not enough board members to support all committees, consider increasing the size of the board, and look for a potential member whose expertise is lacking within the current board.

Common standing committees include an executive committee, a finance committee, a board development and governance committee, a fundraising committee, and a marketing committee. Temporary committees will depend on specific organizational needs and projects as they come along.

Usually there is an executive committee which acts on behalf of the board between board meetings. The committee is usually composed of the board officers and the committee chairs.

Because nonprofit organizations usually aren’t able to pay board members, it’s important to find board members who have been active in committees and participated in your organization’s activities and meetings over the years.

The board should have a chairman, who presides over the board’s work overall and works with the organization’s executive director or CEO to ensure that the necessary actions are taken to achieve the board’s goals. There should also be a vice chairman to fill in for the chair when needed and to take care of matters assigned by the chairman. A secretary should be appointed as well. This person would be in charge of keeping minutes and overseeing internal bylaw compliance. This position could be filled by the organization’s general counsel. The board would include one of your members overseeing the finance committee with the staff support of your treasurer or chief financial officer.

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