
Ten Basic Responsibilities of Non-Profit Boards

1. *Determine the Organization's Mission and Purpose*

A commitment to the organization's mission should drive the board's sense of public accountability. The board is responsible for setting policy and the general direction of the organization.

2. *Select and Support the Chief Executive and Assess His/Her Performance*

The board should assure that the chief executive received frequent and constructive feedback and is assisted when board members overstep or misunderstand their roles.

3. *Ensure Effective Organizational Planning*

Board members must be involved extensively in the strategic planning process if they are to assume proper "ownership" of the plan and otherwise help to implement many of the goals and objectives, including the acquisition of new resources. Their role is essentially one of asking good questions, expecting good answers, and serving as a resource in areas of personal and professional expertise. Because board members are, or should be, free of vested interest and are responsible for considering issues and rendering judgments for the organization as a whole, and because they must ultimately assess the quality of the goals and objectives resulting from the process, they should be involved extensively in the strategic planning process.

4. *Ensure Adequate Resources*

Providing adequate resources is first and foremost a board responsibility, with the board setting fundraising targets and goals. All board members should make an annual gift in line with their means. Their personal and collective example is very important. The board is responsible for thinking about the long-term sustainability of the organization, and may advocate the creation of revenue generating activities that can grow.

5. *Manage Resources Effectively*

Boards traditionally exercise their responsibility by helping to develop and approve the annual budget.

6. *Monitor, and Strengthen the Organization's Programs and Services*

The board should have a good sense of its monitoring and oversight role by seeking a balance between the board's responsibility to ensure quality, cost effective programs and services and the staff's responsibility to creatively initiate and develop them. The board best performs its role by asking the right questions and expecting good answers.

7. *Enhance the Organization's Public Standing, Acting as the Eyes and Ears of the Organization both Within and Outside of the Community*

Board members serve not only as a link between the organization's staff and its constituents, but also as the organization's ambassadors, advocates, and community representatives. Clearly articulated achievements, contributions to the public good, and explanations for how revenue are allocated are all part of the process. The board is also responsible for feeding information back to the organization from the community.

8. *Ensure Legal and Ethical Integrity and Maintain Accountability*

One of the marks of an effectively managed and governed organization is its ability to avoid having its board adjudicate personnel issues except in the rarest of circumstances.

9. *Recruit and Orient New Board Members and Assess Board Performance*

Boards have the responsibility for self-assessment on an annual basis, particularly the performance of individual board members eligible for reelection. The nominating committee oversees the process of defining membership needs of the board, cultivates perspective nominees, checks performance, and provides orientation.

10. *Provide Time and Support to the Organization, as Feasible*

Recognizing that board members are only able to contribute as much as they are able, depending on other commitments, it is important the members are clear about what they can and cannot do and inform other board members when their availability changes. Regardless of the level of participation, contributions of individual board members need to be recognized and honored.

"A good board is a victory, not a gift."

Cyril O. Houle in *Governing Boards*