

What Does a Good Board Member Do?
A compilation of suggestions from various sources

Be effective as a Board member. How do you do this?

Be sure that Board members understand and agree on the values that underlie the organization

Understand your responsibilities as a Board member

Help other Board members understand and act on their responsibilities

Be engaged by attending Board meetings and reading materials sent to you so that you are prepared for the Board meeting

Clearly state your informational needs. What do you need to know in order to make effective decisions?

Evaluate the recommendations of Board Committees with questions that clarify the Committee's deliberations and conclusions without redoing the Committee's deliberation process. Evaluating the recommendations of a Board Committee involves offering new perspectives that add value to the Committee's original deliberations.

Respect the right of other Board members to hold perspectives and opinions that are different from your own.

If you believe that an issue or topic should be addressed by the Board but has not been, express this to the Chair and other members of the Board. A Board member has the responsibility to be sure that the Board fully addresses its scope of duties.

If a member of the Board is not participating actively in Board deliberations, ask them a question to secure their views.

Assist the Chair in keeping the Board meetings on track by not wandering onto interesting but unrelated topics, not engaging in side conversations, and not asking unrelated questions.

Encourage the Board to develop a statement that explain the process of decision-making (ie., focus of decision, evidence gathered, method of evaluating the evidence, method of reaching a conclusion) so that how and why the Board made a particular decision can be explained to others.

Once a Board decision is made, stand as a BOARD behind the decision and speak as a BOARD for the decision.

Effective Board members ask these types of questions:

How does this action or decision reflect our core values?

What are the different programs we offer? Who does each serve? How? For what desired results?

How do we evaluate the needs of those we serve? How do we weigh different expectations on us and then assign priorities?

Who are our collaborators? Who might be? What do we expect from a partnership? How do we evaluate the potential costs or benefits of working with others in the context of our mission and values?

What are the results of each program? How do we know? Do these results justify our commitments to the program?

What do our members (clients, stakeholders) know about what we do, how we do it, and why we do it?

How do we involve our members (clients, stakeholders) in determining what we should do and how we should allocate our resources?

How do we insure that our members are informed about Board decisions/actions and what we do as an organization?

Do we tell a compelling story of our work and activities, one that inspires people to be a part of our work?

Do we provide appropriate direction to our CEO in terms of performance expectations?

Do we provide timely evaluations of our CEO?

Do we have a process for evaluating the tasks that need to be completed so we can accomplish our mission?

Do we have a process for determining whether the tasks should be completed by staff or volunteers?

Are our personnel policies up-to-date and do they reflect our organizational values?

What if the CEO suddenly left the organization? What would we really do?

Effective Board members understand the meaning and scope of their fiduciary responsibilities, and then exercise these responsibilities.

What do we do to insure that all Board members have the same base level of understanding on how to read our financial reports?

Do we think about trends and issues depicted in our financial reports? Do we have an operating budget? Do we have a 3-5 year financial plan?

How do we assess the accuracy of our financial numbers?

How do we know if all bills and taxes are being paid in a reasonable time?

How do we know if we are operating our organization in accordance to rules, regulations and fiscal policies?

What criteria do we use to set spending priorities?

Finally, an effective Board member has the courage, if your gut tells you “Something Is Not Right,” to SAY SO at once

Questions Nonprofit Board Members Should Always Ask

<http://www.managementhelp.org/misc/Boards-Ask-Questions.pdf>

Adapted from “Field Guide to Developing, Operating and Restoring Your Nonprofit Board”

– to get the publication, click on “Publications” at www.authenticityconsulting.com

How do we help our Board Committees to be more effective?

First off, why use Board committees? Why not all of us do everything?

Board committees are used to save time at general meetings. Matters can be discussed and reviewed in detail by a committee and recommendations brought to the general meeting. The work of the organization becomes more efficient. The specialized skills and interests of members are used to their full advantage. More members get involved in the detail work of the organization. Responsibilities are shared according to skills and interests of members.

New or inexperienced members can gain valuable insight into the organization and develop confidence by serving on committees.

Suggestions for more effective Board Committees

Board committees should have clearly defined job descriptions that state the expectations for what they will accomplish during a year and the products to be delivered to the whole Board. The job descriptions should explain: What's the purpose and authority of this committee?

- What are the responsibilities and specific tasks of this committee?
- How do these responsibilities tie to our strategic plan and organizational mission?
- What are the time limits on this committee?
- What type of reporting to the organization is expected?
- How are members picked for this committee?
- What's the budget of this committee?
- What's the term of office for members? How do we fill vacancies?
- What resources does this committee have and what will it need to complete its task?

Present a report to the full Board prior the Board meeting. This report should:

Be concise, but should show that a full discussion was held and all options were considered.
Present specific recommendations if this is an appropriate outcome from the discussion, OR
clearly state the report is for informational purposes only.

When submitting a recommendation to the Board, a committee should:

State the issue they addressed
Explain how they generated solution options
State the criteria used to evaluate the solution options
State the method used to make the choice
Offer a summary of why the recommendation was selected

Choose committed members who can advance the objectives set for the committee and who are able to actively participate in the work. Make committee assignments based on the experience, skills, interests, and available time of board members.