



Top Five Responsibilities of Nonprofit Board Members

Having managed or worked for nonprofits most of my career, I have seen effective and ineffective boards of directors. Good boards of directors are clear about their roles and responsibilities versus those of the Executive Director, and don't overstep their boundaries. I feel that the five most important responsibilities of board members are as follows:

1. Board members are responsible for recruiting, hiring, and evaluating the organization's Executive Director. They should not be responsible for staff members who report to the Executive Director, as that is the Executive Director's responsibility. If a board member becomes aware of an issue or problem with a staff member, s/he should take this issue directly to the Executive Director. There are times when a staff person may be experiencing problems with the Executive Director. Instead of going to the Executive Director, the staff person may attempt to approach a board member to discuss the problem. At this point, the board member should be clear about his/her role and direct the staff person back to the Executive Director, as the Executive Director is responsible for resolving issues with his/her staff members. However, if the staff person wants to file a grievance against the Executive Director or appeal a decision made by him/her, then the board may have to get involved. Nonprofit organizations generally have some type of policy in place that allows a staff person to go to the Executive Director's supervisor (in this case, the board) to address a complaint or issue that cannot be resolved with the Executive Director.
2. Board members are responsible for strategic planning, both short-term and long-term. With the Executive Director, board members should periodically examine the organization's mission, vision, needs, and resources, and develop goals and objectives that support the organization's operations and promote growth over a specified time period. The board should also monitor the strategic plan, either monthly or quarterly, to ensure its goals and objectives are being met in a timely manner.
3. Board members are responsible for developing and modifying the organization's policies and procedures, both regular and personnel policies. If staff members feel that a specific type of policy needs to be developed or modified, they should be encouraged to bring it to the attention of the Executive Director. The Executive Director should then present the policy issue to the board of directors. In presenting the issue, the director should state what the policy is and

why an addition or modification is being recommended. Once a new policy has been drafted by the board, or a modification to the existing policy has been made, the board should run it by the Executive Director for input/feedback prior to final approval.

4. Board members are responsible for fundraising, whether they participate in fundraising activities, events, and campaigns, or contribute money. The organization's strategic plan should include fundraising goals and objectives, and the board should have a fundraising committee in place to monitor the completion of these goals and objectives. This board committee can include staff members, but at least three board members should be active participants on this committee.
5. Board members should be the organization's ears and eyes in the community. In other words, board members should observe and listen to what stakeholders in the community are saying about their respective nonprofit organization, its programs and services, its staff members, how services are delivered, and how clients/consumers are treated. They should share this information with the Executive Director, whether it is positive or negative. Their intent in conducting this activity should be to help the Executive Director and his/her staff improve the organization's operations, responsiveness to consumers and other stakeholders, and overall effectiveness, efficiency, and success.

Boards of directors can have other roles and responsibilities, but the five that I mentioned above are the most critical. Make sure that you communicate these roles and responsibilities with potential board members prior to them coming on board. It is important that they clearly understand what is expected of them, both verbally and in writing (e.g., board member job description). By outlining and discussing these roles and responsibilities upfront, it will be clear what they do and what the Executive Director does, strengthening the relationship between the two parties.

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If you want to make positive changes in your professional life, and create the job or career you desire and deserve, then working with Executive & Life Coach, Sharon L. Mikrut, is the solution. Although her specialty is in partnering with nonprofit executive directors and managers to maximize their resources in a competitive environment, she is passionate about working with all individuals committed to personal and/or professional growth. Visit her website (<http://www.createitcoaching.org>), Nonprofit Professionals blog (<http://www.createitcoaching.com>), or Empowerment blog (<http://www.createitcoaching.net>) and sign up for her free nonprofit or life coaching newsletter.