

10 Fundamental Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards¹

Establish Mission and Vision:

The board must articulate the mission and vision of the organization in a formal statement which is made widely visible. The board should, on a regular basis, discuss the relevance and clarity of the mission. All board members must be knowledgeable about the mission and the vision and clear on what results will occur as a result of the work of the organization.

Approve & Monitor Strategies Used to Achieve Mission:

The board is responsible for ensuring that programs are consistent with the organization's mission, that services are provided according to best practices and are regularly evaluated and monitored to ensure effectiveness.

Ensure Legal and Ethical Practices and Accountability:

The board is responsible for the organization's adherence to all laws and regulations and for establishing ethical practices. The board must ensure effective personnel practices such as employee handbooks and a clear process for reporting grievances. The board must establish bylaws and policies for governance and fiscal oversight.

Build a Skilled and Diverse Board:

The board is responsible for developing policies and a process for the ongoing identification and recruitment of board members whose skills, attributes and backgrounds match the identified needs and priorities of the board. The board should develop a comprehensive orientation process and steps to engage and orient new board members. In addition, the board must regularly assess its own performance and develop regular plans for board development.

¹ Adapted from Ingram, R.T. (1988). *Ten basic responsibilities of nonprofit boards*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Nonprofit Boards.



Recruit & Hire (When Needed, Terminate) The CEO:

The board is responsible for establishing a process to identify the leadership needs of the organization and for conducting a thorough and professional search for the chief executive. Boards must approve the job description for the chief executive, reach consensus on the skills needed, and develop a process for hiring the final candidate. When the need to terminate the chief executive arises, board must follow a careful and legal decision process and respect confidentiality.

Support the Chief Executive and Assess his/her Performance:

The board supervises and assesses the performance of the chief executive and must establish an effective and fair process to accomplish these responsibilities. The board supports and provides inspiration for the chief executive. On a yearly basis the board, though the use of an appraisal committee, evaluates the executive's performance and provides feedback and support for future progress.

Ensure Adequate Resources:

The board is responsible for ensuring that the organization has the resources to implement strategies to achieve its mission. It is the board's responsibility to determine a fund development plan and to approve and fully engage and support strategies to raise the funds needed to run the organization. Board should establish a policy around board giving and participation.

Ensure Fiscal Soundness and Accountability:

It is the responsibility of the board to ensure that the organization has appropriate budgeting and fiscal reporting tools and practices in place. The board must safeguard the organization's tax-exempt status and ensure the organization is accountable to its donors and public. It must make sure appropriate checks and balances are in place.

Engage in Strategic Planning:

The board is charged with working with volunteers, staff and stakeholders in regular planning efforts and to establish a multi-year strategic plan. The board must ensure that goals and objectives are established and track results to inform future plans.

Serve as Stewards in the Community:

The board is responsible for actively promoting the organization, its services and impact throughout the community. Board members are essentially ambassadors for the organization and should clearly articulate the mission and goals of the organization as part of an overall organizational public relations plan.

