

SECTION V: BOARD ASSESSMENT

Summary

Board Assessments are crucial to understand gaps within your board. This section will offer insight into best practices and templates for conducting the assessments, as well as guidance on recruitment and engagement.

Best Practices

Conduct an Annual Self-Assessment

Board assessments can serve as useful tools in creating actionable board improvement plans. As a best practice, organizations are encouraged to undergo a board self-assessment process during their strategic planning process. This usually only happens every three years, so it is also recommended to engage in an annual board self-assessment process. Doing this every year ensures that board members can celebrate the areas they excel in and work on their areas of weaknesses. The assessment should be sent to each board member and have a participation rate of at least 80 percent. A common purpose of board assessments includes incorporating the results in the agenda of upcoming board retreats. The retreats are most successful when done separate from a regular board meeting and led by an external facilitator.

While committee work is certainly part of larger board work, it is imperative to commit to a self-evaluation process specifically for committees. This is to be completed annually at the end of each year and tailored to each board committee. This process is a forum for committee members to reflect and give feedback on their experiences. These questionnaires can be a huge help in enhancing the effectiveness of the committee. Questions should be tailored to uncover the strengths and weaknesses so that responses can inform action plans for improvements with items like committee charters and board member scorecards.

Board Recruiting and Selection/Acceptance

Board recruitment is a critical board responsibility and is an ongoing committee function. While the Board Development Committee often leads this effort, it falls on the entire board's shoulders to ensure that there is a pipeline of eligible and deserving individuals to fill board seats. This is a year-round process that includes prospecting, contacting, recruiting, orienting, supporting, training, evaluating, and assessing potential and new board members.

Best Practices

Job Descriptions for Board Members

To begin, it is imperative that potential board members, as well as existing board members, have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The foundation of this understanding can be laid forth in a written board member job description. The job description should include board member duties, rewards and benefits of serving as a director and should always highlight the

mission and values of the organization. In addition, this description can be used as a recruitment tool as well as a point of discussion during annual assessments. Knowing roles and responsibilities is key to building and cultivating a well-functioning board.

Analyze the Landscape

Prior to engaging in a board recruitment strategy, it is helpful to assess the current board landscape. In this sense, board members can be made aware of skills, expertise, resources, connections, and attributes needed on the board. Often, this information can be gathered by completing a board matrix or even a SWOT analysis. Insights gained after completing one of these activities can help identify prospects as well as current members who should continue on the board. Board recruitment should always fold into the organizational priorities for the next few years. Additional factors to always consider are the organization's mission and vision.

Invitation for Applications

Once prospects are identified, the board development committee will invite these candidates to apply for a board member position. It is also best practice to invite the prospect to a site visit and see programs in action. Applications should be reviewed thoroughly and with the skill sets needed kept in mind. Ideally, the prospect meets with the executive director and one to two members of the board Governance/Nominating Committee. Following the interview, the committee should provide follow-up information to the full board on all prospects they will be recommending to join the board. Those who will not be invited should also be reviewed with key points on why this decision was made. In the next board meeting, formal nominations can be presented for a vote.

In addition to the onboarding process, it is critical to announce board appointments in publications identified by the new board member, as well as to funders and major donors of the organization.

Letter of Agreement

The letter of agreement explains the roles and expectations of an individual board member. It explains both the commitment that the board member has to the organization and the organization's commitment to him/her.

Board Engagement

Once a new board member has officially joined the board of directors, it's important to keep him/her engaged. Board members are often very busy with their career and family.

Best Practices

Onboarding and Orientation

The onboarding process of a newly elected board member is the foundation of their tenure at the organization. Onboarding should include:

- another program site visit so that the newly elected board member can deepen their connection to the mission
- thoughtful preparation for the board orientation determined by the board chair and board development committee
- distribution of the board member handbook
- assignment of immediate tasks by joining 1-2 committees
- ongoing support and training

Board chairs should touch base with new board members after their first board meeting and within six months of the new director joining.

Annual Calendar

The annual calendar lays out all the board meetings and committee meetings, as well as other engagement opportunities such as site visits, cultivation events and fundraisers. This should be sent to all board members at the top of the year to allow for board members to prioritize the meetings. Board members should conduct a program site visit at least once a year to connect with the programs and better understand its impact.

Board Buddies

Boards may also find it useful to develop a board “buddy” system, pairing experienced board members with newly elected members. This will allow new members to see firsthand the actions of a participative and active board member. Issues and successes can be captured and discussed through a self-assessment at the end of the first year of the board member, during an annual board retreat, and even during a mid-year meeting.

Term Limits

Board tenure should be managed through term limits. Board directorship is not a life time appointment and new members can help bring new life to the organization and bring the organization forward. Organizations are encouraged to consistently express their gratitude for the volunteerism of current and past board members, but not expect these individuals to stay on the board beyond term limits. Term limits can serve as a recruitment tool, engage those on the board who want to remain committed and honor those whose tenures have come to an end. This is especially important for officers’ positions so that leadership on the board stays dynamic and current with the organization’s needs. Term limits should be 2-3 years with the option to re-up 2-3 times.

Board Recognition

Nonprofit board members contribute their time, passion, expertise, networks, and finances to nonprofit organizations and they receive no financial rewards in return. A board recognition program is an important tool to demonstrate the appreciation that nonprofit organizations have for the board members' leadership and dedication. The recognition program could create systems to publicly recognize and thank board members, and introduce them to national programs to augment their board leadership skills.

Recognizing board members' accomplishments and commitment to the organization would have an impact beyond the initial honor of recognition. The recognition would also result in greater retention and a deeper excitement about and commitment to the organization, as board members understand the difference that the work has made to the organization as a whole.

Overview and Best Practices

Communicate Your Gratitude

When board members provide important contributions—whether helping out at an event, providing counsel on important organizational issues, or doing anything else extraordinary—thank them. Whether in person, on the phone, or in an email, showing your appreciation is important.

Recognize Your Board Members

When you publish printed materials, such as annual reports, brochures, or other organizational materials, list the names of your board members. You can also nominate them for recognition outside the organization. At the end of their terms, you can also present them with certificates honoring their service to the organization.

The “About Us” section of nonprofit websites provides a perfect platform for prominently listing your board members and giving visitors background information highlighting their experience and areas of expertise.

SECTION V: RESOURCES

Sample Board Member Scorecard³²

[ORGANIZATION NAME]
Board of Directors Scorecard

Summary of Activities		
Name and Current Position (e.g., Treasurer; ___ Committee Chair):		Member since:
Term ends:		Eligible for re-election?
Committee Memberships	Committee(s)	
_____ (enter current year)		
_____ (enter previous year)		
_____ (enter additional, prior year)		
Participation and Contribution	Current Year	Previous Year
• Board meeting attendance:	_____ Number or % (e.g., 3 out of 4 or 75%)	_____ Number or % (e.g., 3 out of 4 or 75%)
• Committee meeting attendance:	_____ Number or % (e.g., 3 out of 4 or 75%)	_____ Number or % (e.g., 3 out of 4 or 75%)
• Total Annual Giving:		
• Getting:		
• Committee Participation beyond meeting attendance:		
• Event participation:		
• Other Service (including in-kind):		
Stated goals for Upcoming Year:		
Additional Comments		

³² Source: Adapted from The Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York, Inc. (NPCC)
 Modified from Executive Director Richard Berlin, Harlem RBI, New York, NY as reprinted in *Board & Administrator*. April 2006 Vol. 22, No. 8

Sample Board Member Contract

- Kim Klein. *Recruiting Better Board Members*. Grassroots Fundraising Journal and Greenlights For Nonprofit Success, www.greenlights.org. Found at: <http://www.adelphi.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/91/files/2012/09/boardmembercontract.pdf?t=1347912985-74862>.

Other Resources

- National Council of Nonprofits. *Self-Assessments for Nonprofit Boards*. <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/self-assessments-nonprofit-boards>