

Module 1.1: Governance, Leadership & Mission

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Renz, 2004

Non-profit governing boards are “where the buck stops.” At least in the US, the board oversees operations, acts as the public face of the organisation, and sets the course for the mission. Board-members are legally obligated to be conscientious leaders and act in good-faith, complying with the mission of the non-profit. As part of their fiduciary responsibility, board-members handle funds and assets as if in trust for the communities they serve; this entails external audits to “get a second opinion” of the organisations efforts and success.

Renz moves on to describe the structures and characteristics of governing boards. Most have, at minimum, a chair, vice chair, secretary, and treasurer as officers. Standing committees, special task forces, and consultants also assist the board with decisions and operations; typical committee tasks include acting on behalf of the board, nominating officers to the board, raising and managing funds, &c. Renz cautions that these committees and task forces not take over the role of existing organs within a non-profit or only as an emergency measure if they must. Beyond legal obligations, officers are expected to actively contribute to and prepare for meetings, understand the bylaws and mission of the non-profit, and work as supportive and effective leader to the organisation

Negligent or careless officers on the board are at best unhelpful, at worst a liability to the rest of the organisation, and as such can be sanctioned for the good of the non-profit. Renz gives extra attention to conflicts of interests; such conflicts are unavoidable, but disclosing conflicts and removing the conflicted party from deliberation and decision is expected.