

Board Development

The Board of Directors of not-for-profit (non-governmental) organisations defines the purpose of the organisation, sets priorities and direction for the activities of the organisation, evaluates outcomes and ensures the financial health of the organisation. The best Boards understand and embody the values and mission of the organisation and hold the vision for the future work of the organisation.

Quality in Practice

Board development starts with participation — who is on the Board of Directors? Board membership should be diverse, including:

- people served by the organisation and their allies
- community members from all sectors of community
- individuals with skills and expertise in finance, law, marketing, public relations or other areas of importance to the work

There should be a Nominating (or Board Development) Committee that works year round to seek out Board members who embody the experiences, knowledge, expertise and connections the Board desires.

Members of the Committee continually explore and make connections in the community to explain the organisation and to find people with the heart for the work. The Committee is seeking people who, when they hear about the work of the organisation, are willing to “get up off the couch and act.”

Board members need information and training on how to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities. This comprises the technical aspects of Board work. Community resources for this type of training include: universities and colleges, associations for non-profits whose purpose is to support the development and growth of other non-profit organisations, and local accounting firms.

The Board should put into place a structure to ensure that the **fiduciary** responsibilities of the Board are attended to, such as Committees for Budget and Finance, Audit Committee and/or Programme Evaluation.

The Board of Directors should engage in planning to figure out what is most important to the organisation and to develop a practical vision for three to five years into the future. Some call this strategic planning. It should be a facilitated process and involve staff and constituents, as well as board members.

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continued

Board Development (continued)

The **generative** role of the Board of Directors is characterised by reflecting on the actions of the organisation and learning to make sense of what happened. Generative thinking should produce new meaning for the future of the organisation. Working generatively, requires Boards to see the situation from the whole and seek to understand how the work of the organisation is woven into the fabric of community life.

This approach moves boards from scarcity thinking (how can our organisation get more of already scarce resources and have a bigger share of the pie) to abundance thinking (how can our organisation share and use resources in a way that maximises our contribution to the life of the community). Working generatively, a Board of Directors can see emergent strategies that will become important to the organisation and community in the future.

The Board of Directors engages in work at the boundaries of the organisation in order to learn and see what is driving the organisation. This can be done by:

- participating in organisational activities with people it serves
- spending time with staff in the field
- talking with constituents of the organisation
- being actively involved in many aspects of community life

Board members ask deep, probing questions to discover the source of the mission and programmes of the organisation. These questions explore where the organisation's ideas come from, what the intentions of individual board members are and how this shapes the organisation.

To learn more about the generative role of the Board, see the book *Governance as Leadership* by Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan and Barbara E. Taylor.

Another good resource is BoardSource
www.boardsource.org