



You Say “Trustee,” I Say “Director”

Does it matter, or is it just semantics?

Q:

I’m starting a new nonprofit organization, a 501(c)(3) social-service organization. Which should I develop—a board of trustees or a board of directors? Exactly what are the differences? And where can I get information on forming such a board?

A:

Your question highlights a common confusion. A “board of trustees” is essentially the same as a “board of directors.” While the term “trustee” is most frequently associated with a trust, some charitable organizations that aren’t trusts use the term “board of trustees” rather

than “board of directors.” The term “board of trustees” is most often used by private foundations, colleges, and universities.

Whether you call your board members “trustees” or “directors,” they’re the people who set and implement your organization’s policy. You are right that forming a board is one of the first, most crucial steps in starting a nonprofit organization.

For more information on developing your board, see the *Resource Center Catalog*, beginning on page 22. We especially recommend “Who Should Be on Your Board?” in *Board Leadership & Governance, Leadership Series* (see page 22 of this issue) and “How to Create an Effective Board” in *The Nonprofit Start-Up Kit* (see page 24). Also, keep reading *Nonprofit World* for regular articles on boards and for board workshop information. ■

As an organizational member of the Society for Nonprofit Organizations, you are invited to send in, every month, one question which you or your organization would like answered. You will receive a written response from one of our panel of experts—professionals located throughout the country. Selected questions and answers will be published in each issue of *Nonprofit World*. If you prefer that your question appear anonymously, please let us know. Send questions to: Ask the Experts, *Nonprofit World*, 6314 Odana Rd., Suite 1, Madison, WI. 53719. Include your name, address, phone number, and Society membership number.