

# Board Problems Reflected in Training Requests

## What training is appropriate for board members?

**Q** Some of our board members tend to micromanage. I see it even when we discuss board training. They ask for training on subjects that I think are more appropriate for staff, such as how to write a management plan. Although I understand that they need to know about the issues impacting our mission, I don't believe board training should duplicate staff training. Am I wrong? And, if I'm correct, can you provide examples of board trainings or at least descriptions of what board members should be trained in? Thank you in advance for your insights.

**A** Some people would say you should be grateful that your board is asking for training! But you're absolutely right. While there may be some areas of overlap that would make it appropriate, even desirable, to offer the same training to board and staff, that is not usually the case. And you hit the nail on the head with your first statement: You would only be opening the door to further micromanagement if you trained the board in such staff-related subject areas as you note here.

The board requires training in three areas: mission, community, and governance. "Mission" might include information on your organization's history, the issues most relevant to what you do, client stories, statistics around such things as the numbers of people served, the impact your organization has made, and the jargon and acronyms you use. Training in the area of "community" might cover changing demographics, the economy, and changes in volunteerism. "Governance" training should better prepare board members to do their jobs. Such training might include tips for soliciting gifts, how to craft an elevator pitch, the latest proven practices, or how to read a financial statement. In your case, governance training might entail reviewing what governance is and isn't, so as to move the group away from micromanagement.

The specifics of the training will depend on your board goals for the year. For instance, if one of your goals is to change legislation around land conservation, you'll want to provide information on the benefits of the changes, the parameters within which a 501(c)3 organization can lobby, and techniques for lobbying legislators.

You can offer your own training. Peer to peer training is always a good way to go because board members are more likely to listen

to their colleagues, it provides those doing the training with the opportunity to take on an interesting challenge, and people tend to learn best what they teach others. But you can always use staff, where appropriate, or bring in a community leader or subject expert. You can use such techniques as games, tours, reality practice, and videos to impart the information in a more interesting and interactive manner.

You can also take advantage of the plethora of offerings available on the Web and through your United Way, community foundation, or local college. An Internet search will provide you with not only good options but also ideas for designing your own trainings. (Be sure to check out the Society's Board Governance Learning Institute program online at [nonprofitworld.org/learninginstitute](http://nonprofitworld.org/learninginstitute).)

It's a good idea to integrate some board training at every meeting. It needn't take a lot of time. It can be as simple as putting a new statistic on the back of everyone's name plate. At the other end of the spectrum, it could involve a several-day trip to Washington, D.C., to see the legislative process in action and learn how to lobby within the parameters of your tax-exempt status.

A well-conceived board education plan will go far in helping your board make the best decisions possible for your organization and the community it serves. If you have a board development or governance committee, creating the plan would be an appropriate task for that committee. If your biggest micromanagers are on that committee, perhaps you can work with the board chair to identify a few independent board members—maybe even past board members—who "get it" and would be willing to take on this project. **S**

*Terrie Temkin, Ph.D., Founding Principal  
CoreStrategies for Nonprofits, Inc.  
[corestrategies4nonprofits.com](http://corestrategies4nonprofits.com)*

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