

Do You Need Job Descriptions for Your Board Members?

Is a job description really necessary?

Q I'm on the board of a fairly new nonprofit organization, and we're actively recruiting members. Someone recently mentioned that we should have "job descriptions" for new board members. Is this true? If so, how do we create them?

A Nearly all successful boards have some sort of "job description" or "board agreement" or "board contract." The best of these are reciprocal: They spell out what you're expected to do and what you can expect in return.

An example of what the board member will provide might read like this: "I accept fiduciary responsibility for the organization and will oversee its financial health and integrity."

An example of what the board member can expect in return: "I expect timely, accurate, and complete financial statements to be distributed at least quarterly, one week in advance of the relevant board meeting. I also expect to be trained to read and interpret these financial statements."

As you can see, this approach helps avoid misunderstandings, because the specifics are covered in enough detail to make everything explicit. Perhaps you're thinking, "Boy, this seems so formal. Our group is much more relaxed. If we

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set specific rules – and hold people to them – it's going to feel a lot different around here.”

You're right: It *will* feel different: less confusion, fewer unspoken assumptions, more accountability. It will change the culture of your group. However, informality and clear expectations aren't mutually exclusive. If you work it right – creating a job description but also reserving time in your meetings for food, stories, and celebrating the mission – you can have both.

–Andy Robinson, *TrainYourBoard* (trainyourboard.com, andy@andyrobinsononline.com), author of *What Every Board Member Needs to Know, Do, and Avoid* (emersonandchurch.com), from which this answer is excerpted.

Also see (at NonprofitWorld.org):

What Are the Board's Three Essential Functions? (Vol. 20, No. 5)

Reciprocal Board Agreements: What Do Board Members Give? What Do They Expect in Return? (Vol. 28, No. 1)

Is Founder Liable for Future Wrongdoing?

Are you responsible for malfeasance at an organization after you leave it?

Q I'm a founder, initial registered agent, and initial board member of a nonprofit. I don't now serve on the board, nor does the board follow the bylaws of this 501(c)(3). Am I in any way responsible for unfiled taxes or anything else that may go wrong in the future?

A In general, once you resign all your positions of responsibility with a nonprofit organization you shouldn't

be liable for failures occurring in the future. If tax returns weren't filed on your watch, or if negligence occurred or people were injured while you were in a responsible position, you could possibly be brought back into the situation. But a complete disassociation from any responsibility within the organization will normally sever any liability for wrongdoing thereafter.

–Don Kramer, *Nonprofit Issues*, nonprofitissues.com

