



How Long Should Board Members Serve?

Q:

Our present board of directors assembled rather hastily last year, and no time provisions were set on their term of duty. Nor did we decide on term limits for people holding board offices.

Also, some of the people on the board are non-productive, and they should be the first to go. How do we manage this transition?

A:

The trick to this kind of change is to have everyone stay involved with your organization while gently easing some from the board to committees or an advisory board. The first step is to decide what you want from your board members. For

example, do you want every board member to contribute money, attend board meetings, and serve on a committee? Make a list of these criteria, and give copies to the board. Then ask who would like to remain on the board and can meet those criteria. Explain to the others how they can stay involved so that your organization can benefit from their expertise without abusing their time constraints.

Your board also needs to meet as soon as possible to decide whether to set limits on how long a person can be on the board. This is a question every new board grapples with. Whether there should be term limits is a matter that has been hotly debated. My belief is that when people join a nonprofit board they're not joining the Supreme Court and there definitely should be a limit to how long they serve. My preference for most boards is three years. I think that people really become productive within that time. The three-year limit also makes it easy to stagger the terms.

There are a variety of ways to decide how long a board member should hold an office. Some boards simply ask officers how long they'd like to serve. Other boards draw lots, and others let the nominating committee make suggestions.

Again, it's a good idea to get the input of as many board members as possible. Making everyone feel valued will ease this necessary transition.

*Carol Weisman, President
Board Builders
48 Granada Way
St. Louis, Missouri 63124
314-991-3018, ceufer@aol.com*