



ASK *the experts*

Is the board secretary obsolete?

Is it time to hire a “techie secretary” or get rid of the position altogether?

Q:

Bylaws give board officers certain responsibilities. The secretary’s duties usually include keeping the minutes, posting meeting notices, and protecting the corporate records. In organizations with even a small paid staff, the volunteer board officer serving as the secretary doesn’t routinely handle these responsibilities. It is the paid staff members who take the minutes, mail out the notices, and have custody of the corporate records. The employees usually handle these duties without the knowledge or consent of the secretary (other than to secure a signature). Except for very small organizations without staff, the position seems redundant if not unnecessary. Some organizations have addressed this issue by combining the position of treasurer and secretary. Others have simply eliminated the position. Besides a title role, what do you see as the responsibilities of a secretary (if any) in an established nonprofit organization?

A:

I agree that there is little need for the position of secretary in its traditional form. However, I see the secretary as the chief communicator. In that role, the secretary may become the “Web master.” What I anticipate in the future is the “secretary as techie,” where e-mail, Web site maintenance, and chat room discussions will be under the secretary’s role. I believe the role of the secretary will continue to evolve as methods of communication change.

I also believe that an elected secretary has some obligation to review and edit the staff’s version of what took place in a meeting. For organizations with paid staff, it makes sense for a staff member to take a stab at the first draft of the minutes,

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as board members should be concentrating on the business being conducted. But I still like the idea of having an elected secretary who has the job of editing and proofing the final draft of minutes. ■

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