



35 Questions That Will Transform Your Board



Use this assessment tool as the basis of a group discussion. This discussion ideally should include board members, staff, volunteers, and service recipients.

First, have everyone complete the assessment, checking the indicators they feel have been accomplished and the amount of improvement necessary for each indicator. Compare and discuss people's responses.

Ask each person to select the three indicators they feel need the most improvement. Tally the votes to identify the top three for the group.

Next, begin developing an action plan to address the top three issues. Once those have been achieved, revisit this assessment tool, and begin developing action plans for the other indicators that need attention.

Internal Procedures

1. Does everyone in the organization have a clear sense of the kinds of people they want on the board?
2. Has the organization completed a formal review of the current board and identified areas that need strengthening?
3. Has the organization identified people with the characteristics that are lacking on the board and developed a strategy to recruit them onto the board?

Take this test
to be sure your
board is the
best that it
can be.

4. Does the board have a nominating committee in place?
5. Has the board reviewed the organization's mission? Have board members discussed whether there are any changes in the mission that might require changing the make-up of the board?
6. Have board and staff members spent time talking together about the advantages of having a diverse board?
7. Does your organization cooperate with other nonprofits in your community to develop and maintain a board bank, which you can use to recruit new board members?
8. Do you recruit new board members from within your organization (volunteers, past employees, etc.) as well as outside your organization?
9. Have the board chair and staff developed tools that keep board meetings interesting, fun, and productive? Are meetings evaluated for productivity at least occasionally?
10. Do board members serve without payment unless the organization has a policy identifying reimbursable, out-of-pocket expenses?
11. Are board members accessible to stakeholders and to staff (volunteer and paid)?

12. Does the board play an active role in developing and reviewing a strategic plan for the organization?

Operational Procedures

13. Are the roles of the board clearly stated and communicated? Do board members commit to those responsibilities by signing a board commitment letter?

14. Are board meetings well attended?

15. When board members miss a meeting without giving a reason, does a board member or the executive director call them?

16. Are potential board members interviewed before they are asked to serve?

17. Do board members receive orientation and training, including information on the organization's mission, bylaws, policies, practices, and programs, as well as the board's governance roles and responsibilities?

18. Is there a nominating process to ensure that the board remains appropriately diverse with respect to ethnicity, gender, economic status, culture, disabilities, age, skills, and expertise?

19. Does each board member receive an operations manual that includes the organization's bylaws, a description of board members' responsibilities (including job descriptions for board officers), and a summary of operations procedures?

20. Is the number of board members consistent with what is required in the organization's bylaws and state statutes?

21. Does the board review the organization's bylaws at least once a year? Do bylaws clearly state the organization's purpose, service area, power structure, board limits, number of officers and committees, financial and legal procedures, and guidelines for holding meetings, amending bylaws, and dissolving the organization?

22. Does the board have an annual meeting calendar specifying tasks that routinely need to be done at certain board meetings (for example, review bylaws in November, prepare for audit in August, prepare slate of nominations in July)?

23. Does the board have a policy for handling urgent matters between regularly scheduled meetings?

24. Does the organization maintain a conflict-of-interest policy, which all board and staff members review and sign?

25. Does the board have a written policy prohibiting employees and members of their immediate families from serving as board chair or treasurer?

26. Do board members receive a written agenda and related materials in advance of each board meeting? Are board minutes recorded and action taken on the issues raised in each board meeting?

Fiscal Management

27. Have all board members made a strong financial commitment to the organization?

28. Does the board take the leadership role in fundraising and financial management?

29. Does the board oversee the annual audit and use it to strengthen the organization's financial policies?

30. Is the board doing a good job of insuring that the organization fulfills its regulatory and financial requirements?

31. Does the board prepare an annual budget (based on a recommendation from the executive director), which allocates funds to the major priorities identified in the organization's strategic plan? Do all board members understand the budget?

32. When preparing the budget, does the board seek advice from staff members who are knowledgeable about each program and activity being budgeted?

33. Has a financial plan been developed to ensure financial stability for three to five years? Is this

plan consistent with the organization's strategic plan?

34. Do board members review monthly reports of the organization's expenditures and revenues? Do they compare actual revenues and expenditures to budgeted revenues and expenditures on a monthly basis?

35. Does the board approve all adjustments made to the budget during the year? ■

This assessment tool focuses on the concepts presented during the educational programs produced by the Learning Institute for Nonprofit Organizations, a program of the Society for Nonprofit Organizations (see Board Governance Videotape, available through the Society's Web site, www.snpo.org).

Resources for Discussion

During your group discussion after completing this self-assessment, use these *Nonprofit World* articles (www.snpo.org/members) as a basis for dialogue:

Building Your Nonprofit Dream Team, Vol. 14, No. 5

Learning the Ropes: Orienting New Members, Vol. 7, No. 5

Why You Need a Prenuptial Agreement, Vol. 13, No. 1

Bylaws: The Blueprint for Success, Vol. 6, No. 1

Long-Range Financial Planning: The Board's Role, Vol. 11, No. 6

Board and Staff Consensus: A Powerful Fundraising Tool, Vol. 15, No. 1

Fundraising with Your Board, Vol. 13, No. 5

Planning: What Every Board Member Should Know, Vol. 11, No. 3

Also see the "Board" section of *Nonprofit World CD-ROM*, which includes dozens of useful articles on board governance, and the Board Governance Learning Institute program online, both at www.snpo.org.