



# Five Steps to a Well-Balanced Board

Is your board following these essential steps?

By Mark L. Ryckman

**W**ell-balanced, high-performing boards don't happen by accident. They're the result of careful planning. Check to see if you're overlooking any of these five steps:

**1. Be sure board members understand their role.** They need to focus on setting strategic direction, establishing policy, providing fiduciary oversight, projecting a positive image, and playing an active role in fundraising. Equally important, they must restrain themselves from over-

Some boards continually expand their size.

reaching into daily operations. The executive director and staff need latitude to implement board policy and manage administrative affairs.

**2. Develop manageable board structures.** Some boards, in an attempt to be all-inclusive, continually expand their size and establish a multitude of committees. While inclusiveness is an admirable goal, and attempts should be made to repre-

sent stakeholder groups, too-large boards or too many committees are ineffective. Keeping the board to a manageable number and streamlining the committee system can free board time to focus on the issues of greatest concern.

**3. Recruit to meet your needs.** The nominating committee must analyze the board's makeup and seek to fill areas of need. Is there an appropriate mix between long-term members with experience and new members with fresh ideas? Does the board lack areas of expertise such as finance or human resource skills? Is there enough diversity? The nomi-

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## A well-balanced board will provide creativity.

nating committee needs to address these questions and recruit to fill any voids. A well-balanced board will provide creativity by drawing upon members' diversified backgrounds.

**4. Promote teamwork among board members.** Finding a comfort level among colleagues is crucial. It assures that discussions will be free-flowing and will generate creative ideas. You can build teamwork in workshops, retreats, and special events where board members can get to know one another without the pressure of addressing immediate business.

## Too many committees are ineffective.

**5. Provide time for self-reflection.** At least once a year, board members should conduct self-evaluations to identify the board's strengths and weaknesses. The evaluation process should be conducted in a way that doesn't cast blame. Its purpose is to identify areas of board performance that may need improvement. Although it's easy to become absorbed in immediate issues, it's vital for the board to take time to provide for its own development.

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