

# How Can You Get Board Members to Keep Their Promises?

Poor follow-through is a problem on many boards. Here's how to fix it.

**Q** Our board members always seem eager to help, but most of them don't follow through on their commitments. As the CEO of our nonprofit, how do I get them to do what they've promised?

**A** While this lack of follow-through is frustrating, you must respect the fact that trustees serve as volunteers and set your expectations accordingly. With that in mind, here are tips you can use to encourage board follow-through:

- **Negotiate clear guidelines** for how much time you expect from board members.
- **Develop and use a board “job description”** (also known as a “reciprocal board agreement” or “board contract”) that outlines mutual expectations.
- **Clarify assumptions** by saying them aloud. When board members say, “Yes, I'll do it,” they may mean, “I'll try, but

it's a low priority.” Paraphrase what you've heard to ensure you understand what they really mean.

- **Be sure everyone leaves the meeting with a specific task to complete** before the next meeting. Then ask all board members to report on their assignments when you reconvene. Trustees who avoid or resist this approach will eventually leave your board, making room for new talent, passion, and dedication.

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# Is Gift for Earmarked Computer Deductible?

How should a donor's gift to his partner be treated?

**Q** A donor wants to pay for a new computer for his partner and wants our charity to gift the computer to the partner, which would be within the scope of our mission. The donor would make a cash contribution to our charity and then ask us to buy the computer for the same amount. Is this legal? Is it a restricted gift (it was verbally, but not in writing)? Or if nothing was in writing, is it a general gift and is the expenditure treated as any other to be voted on by the board?

**A** This is a sham, and I wouldn't get involved with it. If your donor makes a contribution on the understanding that it will be used to buy a computer for a designated person, that's effectively an earmarked gift to an individual and isn't

a charitable contribution. The fact that the understanding isn't in writing makes no difference if that was the deal. You couldn't legitimately say that the donor “did not receive any goods or services in return for the gift,” as you would be required to say in a substantiation letter.

Your organization has no role in the suggested transaction other than to give the appearance of a charitable contribution. Let the donor buy the computer and make the gift without involving you.

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