

Q A

1.

What are the basic responsibilities of a nonprofit board?

If you could observe the board meetings of hundreds of nonprofit groups, you would be struck by how different they are in terms of structure, strength of leadership, working style, and relationship with the staff. But despite their diversity, all boards share the same basic duties.

Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards

1. *Determine the organization's mission and purpose.* It is the board's responsibility to create and review a statement of mission and purpose that articulates the organization's goals, means, and primary constituents served (see Question 3).
2. *Select the chief executive.* Boards must reach consensus on the chief executive's responsibilities and undertake a careful

search-and-selection process to find the most qualified person for the job (see Question 70).

3. *Provide proper financial oversight.* The board may assist in developing the annual budget, regularly review financial statements, and ensure that proper financial controls are in place (see Questions 49 and 50).
4. *Ensure adequate resources.* One of the board's foremost responsibilities is to ensure that adequate financial resources exist for the organization to fulfill its mission (see Questions 8 and 47).
5. *Ensure legal and ethical integrity and maintain accountability.* The board is ultimately responsible for seeing that legal standards and ethical norms are respected (see Questions 7 and 52).
6. *Ensure effective organizational planning.* Boards must actively participate in an overall planning process and assist in implementing and monitoring the plan's goals (see Question 5).
7. *Recruit and orient new board members and assess board performance.* All boards have a responsibility to articulate prerequisites for candidates, orient new members, and periodically and comprehensively evaluate their own performance (see Questions 23, 28, 35, and 36).
8. *Enhance the organization's public standing.* The board should clearly articulate to the public the organization's mission, accomplishments, and goals and garner support from the community (see Question 10).
9. *Determine, monitor, and strengthen the organization's programs and services.* The board must determine which programs are consistent with the organization's mission and monitor their effectiveness (see Question 9).
10. *Support the chief executive and assess his or her performance.* The board should ensure that the chief executive has the moral and professional support he or she needs to further the goals of the organization (see Questions 63 and 64).

SUGGESTED ACTION STEPS

1. Board members, write down what you believe are the board's responsibilities. Consolidate the responses in a summary report for discussion at the next meeting. Try to reach consensus on the distinction between board and staff roles.
2. Board chair, invite a knowledgeable and objective volunteer to read the board's minutes from the past year and then observe two board meetings. Ask this person to summarize, based on his or her observations, the board's actual role (not what someone says it should be). You'll find out quickly whether or not the board is fulfilling its responsibilities.