# The Job of the Board Member 

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## "Boards"

The governance of an organization is usually entrusted to a board of directors or other officers. Members of the board have the power to bind the organization by any act or contract within the powers conferred upon them. However, they cannot effect any great or radical change in organization without the assent of the people they represent, unless such power has been given to them.

## What is a Board?

The board is the principal policy-making unit. It is a group of local citizens who meet together to provide directions for an organization. The board makes the organization come alive.... It is the board that gives the organization's effort form and effect.


## Why a Board?

Without the direction of a representative board, organizations might limit their services or products to aid only a small segment of the target population. An effective board reflects the interests of the organization's constituency and provides clear direction for the staff.

The governing board of an organization has full responsibility for the actions of the organization. A majority of all boards in the country are governing boards.


## What Powers Does the Board Have?

The governing board has ultimate decision-making authority on all organization matters. Examples of authority include:

- appointment of the director;
- determination of major personnel, fiscal and program policies;
- determination of overall program plans and priorities;
- final approval of all program proposals and budgets; and - enforcement of compliance with all conditions of grants.



## What are the Board's Responsibilities?

The board has ultimate responsibility. Therefore, it is the board that has ultimate authority for the organization and its activities. The governing board meets its responsibilities to the public by:

- attending and actively participating in meetings regularly and conscientiously;
- holding board meetings open to all interested individuals;
- keeping budgets, program reports and other materials open for public examination;
- encouraging all board members to regularly explain the organization's activities and problems to the groups they represent;
- developing and supporting the mission and maintenance of the organization; and
- developing policy that assists in achieving the mission of the organization.


Officers of the board are elected by the board members. Their respective duties include:

## Board President or Chairman -

directs board meetings; and serves as chief policy-making official on the board.

## Vice President or Assistant Chairman -

conducts business in the president's absence.
Secretary -
takes notes at meetings;
writes letters; and
writes reports.

## Treasurer -

takes responsibility for all financial business.

## "Committees"



Often, the many tasks required of a board result in the board having to divide itself into committees to give more attention to individual tasks. These committees study the problems assigned to them and make suggestions as to how the board should act. The board receives these suggestions and responds by taking action, asking for further study or requesting more help from the committee.

Committees within the board study specific areas of organizational management. Membership of these committees should reflect representation of the total board.

Committees often use the services of outside experts as ad hoc or advisory members. Advisory members generally do not have voting power


## "Executive Committees"



Because business matters arise at unforeseen times, and because it is often difficult to call unscheduled meetings, the board may delegate authority to an executive committee, which generally is made up of the president, secretary, treasurer and one or two members-at-large to do acts for the board between board meetings and during emergencies.

## Who is on the Board?

You . . . and other leaders of government, business, professional agencies and the community serve as board members.

Many people feel that an ideal mix of board members of a public agency would be one-third public officials, one-third professionals related to the organization's field and one-third community members-at-large.

If public officials or representatives from private groups fill fewer than their allotted number of board seats (one-third of the total membership of each), their places would be filled by representatives of the community.

An Ideal Mix for Maximum Participation by Representation of the Community




The board may have any number of members, depending on the situation.

## - Public Officials.

These members may be designated by government officials of the political jurisdiction.

## - Private Groups and Interests.

These are members of business, industry, labor, religion, welfare, education, significant minority groups and other major private groups and interests in the community.

## - Community.

These members may be democratically selected or appointed area representatives and members of groups the organization intends to serve.


The director and staff members are not members of the board. The director is hired by the board and is an employee of the board. This individual is responsible for carrying out the board's policies and serves as captain of the staff.

The organization, with its representative board, brings together a group of people with various values, cultures, interests and standards. Since this is the group that must cooperate to address community issues, it must mold itself into an effective unit.

Working together, the board can determine the various abilities and capacities of each member. In addition, it can discover expertise in a variety of areas, and it can uncover a number of concepts and points of view, all of which contribute toward the board's information resources for the development of policies and strategies.

## Types of Boards

There are many types of boards. Generally they fall into the following categories:

## - Advisory Board -

created to assist staff and board to meet specific needs.

## - Self-generated Boards or Groups -

created by special interest groups to have organizations or agencies respond to them or to serve their needs.

## - Commissions -

created to develop policy and to administrate.

## - Policy Board -

created to govern and maintain an organization and to develop its policies.


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## Why be a Board Member?

An effective board needs active, constructive members to:

- direct and control the activities of the organization;
- help the community understand the purpose of the organization's activities; and
- provide opportunity for participation by every segment of the community.

It is the board's diversity that gives it the ability to build bridges between segments of the community, between government officials and private groups, between professionals and laymen and between organizations that operate related programs.

Remember . . . the authority of the board results from its group action. Only the total board has ultimate authority for the organization. Individual board members do not have decision-making powers.

Active board members are people who:

- have concern for their community;
- have a genuine interest in the goals of the organization; and
- want to work with others to address community issues.

Will you give the active leadership your community needs?


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[^0]:    The Community Action Training Institute, Washington, D.C.

