

Benefits of *Board Self-Assessment*

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Board self-assessment is based on the belief that a board of directors should periodically assess and reflect on its performance in carrying out key board responsibilities. This allows board members to step back from routine governance matters and candidly reflect on how well the board is meeting its responsibilities. Many boards are caught up in the daily oversight of their organization. How is the fund-raising proceeding? Are we on track with our budget? Should we undertake a new program initiative? Self-assessment gives the board an opportunity to step back and say “How are we doing as a board? How can we improve on the way we operate?” Board self-assessment is a way for the board to reflect its contribution to the organizations effectiveness and consider how it can strengthen the way in which it operates and thereby, governs. Self-assessment is not meant to produce a report card. It should not place blame, embarrass or demean particular members of the board. Properly conducted, a self-assessment offers both tangible and intangible value to participating board members, executive director, the organization they govern and assist, and ultimately to the people that the organization serves.

BENEFITS:

- Refreshing and clarifying the board’s understanding of its roles and responsibilities
- Identifying important areas of board operation that need attention/improvement
- Assessing progress toward existing plans, goals, and objectives
- Shaping future structure and as a result, operations of the board
- Defining the criteria for an effective and successful board
- Building trust, respect, and communication among board members, the executive director and staff
- Enabling individual board members to work effectively as part of a team

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING BOARD MEMBERS

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS:

- Know the organization's mission, purposes, goals, policies, programs, services, strengths, and needs.
- Suggest possible nominees to the board who are clearly women and men of achievement and distinction and who can make significant contributions to the work of the board and the organization's progress.
- Serve in leadership positions or undertake special assignments willingly and enthusiastically when asked.

- Avoid prejudiced judgments on the basis of information received from individuals and urge those with grievances to follow established policies and procedures through their supervisors. (All matters of potential significance should be called to the attention of the executive and the board's elected leader as appropriate.)
- Follow trends in the organization's field of interest.

MEETINGS:

- Prepare for and participate in board and committee meetings, including appropriate organizational activities.
- Ask timely and substantive questions at board and committee meetings consistent with their conscience and convictions, while supporting the majority decision on issues decided by the board.
- Maintain confidentiality of the board's executive sessions, and speak for the board or organization only when authorized to do so.
- Suggest agenda items periodically for board and committee meetings to ensure that significant policy-related matters are addressed.

RELATIONSHIP WITH STAFF:

- Counsel the executive as appropriate to offer support in his or her often difficult relationships with groups or individuals.
- Avoid asking for special favors of the staff, including special requests for extensive information, without at least prior consultation with the executive, board, or appropriate committee chairperson.

AVOIDING CONFLICTS:

- Serve the organization as a whole rather than any special interest group or constituency.
- Avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest that might embarrass the board or the organization, and disclose any possible conflicts to the board in a timely fashion.
- Maintain independence and objectivity and do what a sense of fairness, ethics, and personal integrity dictate even though not necessarily obliged to do so by law, regulation, or custom.
- Never accept (or offer) favors or gifts from (or to) anyone who does business with the organization.

FIDUCIARY/ FUND RAISING RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Exercise prudence with the board in the control and transfer of funds.
- Give an annual gift according to personal means.
- Assist the development committee and staff by implementing fund-raising strategies through personal influence with others (corporations, individuals, foundations).