

Tip Sheet for Candid Conversations about Board Governance

These tips are based on the governance areas most likely to be a challenge for boards of directors of small-to-mid-sized nonprofit organizations, as identified in [Leading with Intent](#), National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices (BoardSource.org)

Areas of potential improvement for the board to discuss	Practice Tips
<p>Advocacy: Boards are starting to embrace their roles as advocates for their missions, but the majority of organizations don't have formal policies around advocacy. Only 52% of organizations report that their board members are actively involved as advocates for the nonprofit's mission.</p>	<p>The National Council of Nonprofits adopts a Public Policy Agenda each year that nonprofits can tailor for the state, local, and national issues of most concern to the nonprofit's mission. Every board member can be an advocate! Download the <i>Stand for your Mission</i> discussion guide.</p>
<p>Conflicts of Interest: Not being aware of conflicts or potential conflicts can be a blind spot for some board members/boards.</p>	<p>Adopting a written policy is not enough! Add "conflicts" to the agenda periodically to prompt discussion and promote a culture of candor.</p>
<p>Diversity: Board members say they want more racial and ethnic diversity but aren't prioritizing demographics in their board recruitment strategies. The majority of boards responded that they were "somewhat" or "extremely" dissatisfied with their board's racial/ethnic diversity and prioritization of demographics in board recruitment.</p>	<p>Different is better! Better decisions, heightened awareness, more connections to the community and its needs, are just some of the benefits of increased diversity on nonprofit boards. Here's a self-assessment tool tailored to spark discussion and action steps to address diversity, inclusion, and equity goals for nonprofit boards.</p>
<p>Fundraising: Are all board members on the same page when it comes to fundraising? When board members are recruited what expectations around fundraising are shared with them? Boards give themselves a "B" when it comes to understanding their roles and responsibilities. Orientations, plus ongoing board education and explicit discussions about roles can help.</p>	<p>A board member agreement or "board contract" that is explicit about expectations around fundraising can serve as "talking points" when recruiting board members. Encourage a "culture of philanthropy" by speaking openly at each board meeting about what board members are doing to help ensure that the nonprofit has the resources it needs to advance its mission.</p>
<p>Social time for the board: Fewer than half of nonprofit boards reported investing in social time for the board to get to know and trust one another, yet board members report that social time can lead to deeper engagement, heightened trust, and higher satisfaction levels for board members.</p>	<p>Carve out dedicated time for the board members to spend time together, whether at an annual retreat, or in between meetings, to build bonds and get to know one another outside the meeting agendas. Here are some ideas for board retreats.</p>
<p>Lead with core values: Has your nonprofit's board had a discussion about the organization's core values and how those value shape the board's composition, as well as the activities and strategic initiatives that the organization is pursuing?</p>	<p>"Whether intentional or not, the composition of a board is a reflection of organizational values – what the organization considers to be relevant and important expertise, experience, and perspective for its top decision-making body." (Source: <i>Leading with Intent</i>) Discuss!</p>