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Tip Sheet #4: How to Get the Most from Your Board

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How to Get the Most Out of Your Board

In this Tip Sheet you will learn tips for developing strong board relationship and ensuring that your board is effective and passionate in carrying out the mission of your nonprofit. Board members want to be involved, and they need the support of the staff to build a strong organization.

This Tip Sheet is guest written by Brenda Summers, a nonprofit consultant and adjunct instructor on nonprofit issues at NC State University. (<http://www.summersconsultingservices.com>).

Tips for building your board

Tip #1: Recruiting board members passionate about your mission. Develop a structured process for recruiting board members. Have a Nominations Committee or use the Executive Committee for this role. This is the first step in getting board members who care about your organization.

Tip #2: Define who you want on the board. Use a grid for the needs of the organization – such as community leader, attorney, accountant, communications expert or other areas of expertise you need on the board. Use this tool to ensure diversity on your board. Get to know people before inviting them to serve. Recruit them as volunteers for events, fundraising or other activities so you know their interest in the organization.

Tip #3: Define board responsibilities. Let board members know what you expect of them before they come on the board. Have a list of what the role of board members is for your organization. Include information about conflicts of interest and expectations for attendance and committee work. Have one or two board members meet with a potential recruit to explain responsibilities, review work of nonprofit and to make sure the individual wants to serve.

Tip #4: Provide an orientation session. Provide information about the organization, programs, staff and other board members. Define the roles of the board and the staff. Review budgets and strategic plans. Let them know what the organization has done and where it is going. Make sure they understand their financial management responsibilities.

Tip #5: Give board members a reason to attend meetings. Make your board meeting interesting. Let them know before the meeting key actions that will be expected at the board meeting and provide information for the meeting. Do more than review minutes, budgets and other routine activities – these are important, but provide staff reports and guest speakers who can provide information about environmental issues, public policy opportunities, government activities or other things that could impact your organization. Board

members want to learn new things and find out ways they can strengthen the nonprofit.

Tip #6: Involve the board in planning and keep them informed about progress or setbacks. Board members serve because they believe in your mission and work. They want to be involved in planning. They want to know about challenges before they become common knowledge in the community. Board members want to help you with those, and they want to hear about what is going well. Have staff and board celebrate accomplishments at meetings or other events.

Tip #7: Tasks along with committee work. There are certain committees such as Finance or Fundraising that are important to the organization. Board members will take on those roles if you explain how they benefit the nonprofit. Often though, board members are more willing to take on short-term tasks such as helping with an event or program that has a defined time limit. Remember board members have jobs, families and other responsibilities so make sure they don't feel overburdened with the work of your organization.

Tip #8: Staff engagement. Make sure staff members understand the role of the board and how they can work with the board. Let them know about the strengths of the board and their areas of interest. Have some opportunities where board and staff can network and get to know each other to create better working relationships.

Tip #9: Board Evaluation. Develop evaluation tools so board members can review their individual work each year as well as the overall work of the board. This allows board members to assess their contributions to the nonprofit and how they can improve in the coming year.

Tip #10: Thank Board Members. Too often staff members take board members for granted. Let them know how much you appreciate their efforts. Thank board members after committee meetings, board meetings and other activities where they provide support. Vary your methods by using email, phone calls or handwritten notes.

Resources:

Many organizations and publications have material to assist you with the Board. Here are a few.

NC Center for Nonprofits: www.ncnonprofits.org

BoardSource: <http://www.boardsource.org/>

Nonprofit Quarterly: <http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org/>

The Chronicle of Philanthropy: <http://philanthropy.com/>

If you have any ideas for future Tip Sheets, please [email](#) Nicole Stewart, NC Conservation Network.