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# The Role of the Chair of the Board

Of all the people involved in leading the nonprofit organization, the board chair is in the best position of all to strengthen the organization in addressing key strategic challenges and opportunities. Conversely, a weak, inattentive, or apathetic board chair diminishes the organization’s ability to maximize its potential in serving the community. Even worse, a board chair who is a negative force can undermine the organization’s effectiveness.

The board chair’s primary responsibilities are as follows:

1) To be committed to his or her role in serving in the senior board leadership role.

2) To be committed to the mission of the organization.

3) To take the time to understand the key strategic and financial challenges and opportunities facing the organization. (The organization’s chief executive *should* be the chair’s best resource.)

4) To focus his or her attention on two, three or four issues that matter the most with regard to the organization’s excellence in serving the community and viability for the future.

5) To focus the board’s time and attention, and therefore all board meetings in addressing the key strategic issues. The board needs to be sure that the following organizational matters are addressed under the leadership of the chief executive:

* Assessing the organization’s relevance in today’s environment
* Articulating and documenting the organization’s compelling value in serving the community
* Reviewing the organization’s revenue model to ensure that it will continue to be viable and to make adjustments to strategic and financial strategies as needed

6) To lead the board in developing itself, by ensuring the following:

* Board meeting agendas are focused on key organizational matters such as those listed above under #5
* The board is structured in a logical way to address key organizational issues. That is, the number of board meetings and the committee structure should be designed to allow the board to address key organizational issues.
* The board is comprised of people with the skills, expertise, diversity and relationships that are most needed in order to advance the organization
* Board members understand their role and responsibilities and are appropriately engaged

7) To ensure that the organization has an effective, capable, and well qualified chief executive, and to

* provide the chief executive with the support and assistance he or she needs in order to lead the organization
* ensure that board members are helpful to the chief executive
* ensure that the chief executive has an appropriate compensation package
* conduct an annual review of the chief executive’s performance and provide assistance as needed in helping to develop the executive if that is warranted
* allow the chief executive to lead the organization’s staff and manage the programs, services, and infrastructure
* hold the chief executive accountable for organizational results
* be a fair and supportive partner to the chief executive

8) To be aware of and attentive to the overall effectiveness and vitality of the organization, ensure that the organization is managed with integrity and accountability, and serve as an advocate for the organization.

9) To lead the board and set a visible example in making and generating contributions and funding support for the organization.