

Board Management and Best Practices

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Positional leaders are crucial components of our communities and there are many governmental positions – both elected and appointed. This amounts to a total of 2,664 governmental agencies requiring leadership. We find that 1 in every 45 adults in North Dakota need to serve as a government leader. North Dakota has the highest demand for governmental positional leaders in the country.

Nonprofit organizations impact communities and can shape social life of the area. While there are groups with national affiliations, there are community-specific groups such as bicycling associations, community improvement groups, libraries, arts and cultural groups, and lake associations. The nonprofit sector in North Dakota is thriving, and in 2020 there were a total of 5,269 registered nonprofits across the state. These social organizations also require positional leaders. We find in North Dakota that 1 in every 19 people need to serve as a nonprofit leader. North Dakota ranks seventh in highest demand for nonprofit positional leaders in the country.

When you serve on the board, you have the honor, challenge and responsibility of understanding how everything needs to work together for an organization to accomplish its goals. This is essential work that determines the success or failure of an organization.

The obligation to serve on boards and volunteer time to organizations is not as prevalent as it once was, despite the need being as great as it ever has been.

Volunteers choose not to serve for a number of reasons. Some identified reasons are not fully understanding the organizational mission, no clear understanding of what is expected, not feeling qualified to serve, intimidated by existing “leaders” and being seen as the token minority or simply being asked to serve to represent a particular group. An example is a youth representative you ask with the only intention of showing that you have filled a spot with no plans to truly engage that individual.

- Volunteers, now more than ever, want to make a difference and serve on a board that has a mission aligning with their values. Making your mission known will ensure you are recruiting the right person for the position. Board members are more likely to serve longer and more effectively if they fully understand the mission of the organization. Clearly state and communicate the organizational mission to potential board members and continually communicate it to existing board members.

- Consider creating a position description for board members. In many cases, people do not serve because they simply do not know what is expected of the position. Position descriptions are available for board positions. Utilize what is readily available or create organization-specific descriptions. Either way, be sure you have them. People want to know what is expected and how long they will be serving. Find sample position descriptions at:

<https://boardsource.org/resources/board-member-job-description/>

- Don't set up new board members for failure. Provide adequate training for them. If you use parliamentary procedure to conduct meetings, then be prepared to provide resources they can use for meetings. Train them on specific organizational protocols and eliminate gotcha moments. Consider establishing a mentoring program in which existing board members are partnered with new members to “show them the ropes.” Never assume new board members know how to be a board member. Check for understanding and existing knowledge. Encourage input from all board members. The success of your board members will ensure greater success for the board. See board orientation ideas at:

<https://boardsource.org/resources/board-orientation/>

- New board members can be intimidated easily by existing dominant leaders. By dominant, this doesn't mean simply persuasive and hyper-engaged. This is referring to a dictator who runs roughshod over everyone else. Well-meaning board members caught in this situation dread meetings and are reluctant to even open their mouth for fear of getting shut down and publicly humiliated. Set the tone for meetings and commit to creating a welcoming and safe environment for everyone to participate.

- Value everyone's time and talents. Plan for meetings, utilize an agenda and stick to it. Utilize Robert's Rules of Order and stay on task. People's time is valuable. Finding the right committee for the new board member can be helpful to ensure early engagement. Some people join boards to share their professional expertise with the nonprofit. Others want to do something completely different as a volunteer from what they do in their everyday job.

Board Member Responsibilities

This list provides a number of the responsibilities a board member will be expected to fulfill:

1. Know the organization's mission and purpose.
2. Approve and monitor the organization's programs and services.
3. Ensure effective fiscal management.
4. Be prepared to fundraise if that is an expectation.
5. Organize so the board operates effectively.
6. Select and/or support the executive and review that person's performance.
7. Develop as a board and enhance the organization's public image.
8. Ensure sound risk-management practices are used.
9. Serve as an arbitrator of conflicts that arise in the organization.
10. Serve in a leadership role if asked and accept assignments as directed.
11. Maintain confidentiality.
12. Serve the broader community instead of a small group of people with special interests.
13. Be fair and impartial when making decisions.
14. Avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest.
15. Attend meetings and be prepared to be engaged.

Source: Kansas State Research and Extension Board Leadership Series.

Consider who you are recruiting to serve on your board. If you want different results than what you're getting, you have to try different approaches. Evaluate who you are missing and what deficiencies could be filled. Will the new members fit your current mission and future needs?

At the most fundamental level, who serves on a board impacts how it functions and the decisions it makes. While board composition is not a one-size-fits-all situation, a board that is homogeneous in any way risks having blind spots that negatively impact its ability to make the best decisions and plans for the organization.

Boards will not become more diverse without changes in their board recruitment practices. Strategic board composition does not happen on its own. Boards must define what the ideal board composition looks like — not just in terms of diversity, but also in expertise, experience and networks — and then be vigilant about finding it through focused and disciplined board recruitment.

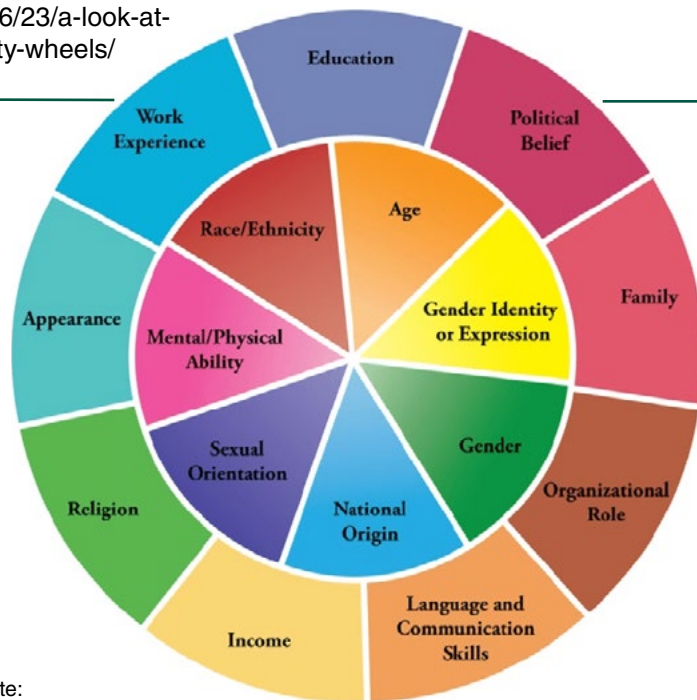
Part of the introspective process regarding the development of a cultural diversity knowledge base can include the consideration of visuals such as the diversity wheel from the Johns Hopkins University Diversity Leadership Council.

"The **center** of the wheel represents internal dimensions that are usually most permanent or visible. The **outside** of the wheel represents dimensions that are acquired and change over the course of a lifetime. The combinations of all of these dimensions influence our values, beliefs, behaviors, experiences and expectations and make us all unique as individuals." (Johns Hopkins Diversity Leadership Council, n.d.).

<https://livingthelearningcurve.com/2018/06/23/a-look-at-diversity-wheels/>

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