

Organizing the Board for Work

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The behavior and productivity of a governing board is in large part a function of how it is organized. While many of the boards of our sponsored ministries have been in place for some time, creating and maintaining effective board organization requires regular attention to the fundamentals.

What Is A Board's Work?

The work of our boards is to: steward the mission of the organization and the CSJ mission, set vision and direction, make informed decisions, oversee organizational performance and manage themselves. The primary purpose of board organization is to ensure that this work gets done. When we as trustees and directors find that, on a regular basis, our boards are not getting through meeting agenda efficiently and in a timely manner, are making decisions when we don't feel fully informed or are tabling important discussion items indefinitely, it is time to assess how we are going about getting our work done.

How Does This Work Get Done?

A not-for-profit board has specific positions (officers) and work units (committees and task forces) that help it organize and accomplish its work. When the officers understand their roles and committees function responsibly, boards can really excel. While boards have authority and bear responsibility **as a body**, significant groundwork frequently gets done by the chairs, in cooperation with the CEO, and by subgroups of board members working in committees.

The Executive Committee, for example, plays a key role in helping a board function at a high level. With the board chair and chairs of the board committees among its members, the Executive Committee can sift through, refine and prioritize numerous items to create a doable agenda that can capture the interest of board members; formulate carefully crafted recommendations; and frame complex issues in manageable terms for full and productive board discussion.

What Must A Board Do To Function Optimally?

We want our boards to not only be organized to do their work efficiently and effectively but also to excel in leading our sponsored ministries to new heights of quality service to the dear neighbor. To ensure that our sponsored ministry boards reach their full potential of serving the ministry, we must invest time and effort on a regular basis in:

- Cultivating a **deep understanding of the mission** of the local ministry through continuous formative event.
- Developing the **habit of strategic thinking** and the skills to communicate vision to your constituencies

- Generating a **shared knowledge base** that is concise, meaningful, "best practice" and timely to ensure decision making is proactive, positive and prescriptive

These three pillars – focus on mission, strategy and shared knowledge – will enable our boards to meet the challenges that inevitably come to most organizations with wisdom and grace.

Basic Necessities for a Well-Organized Board

- Board members have a written job description, a board manual and an institutional policy book.
- Committees and task forces have written statements of membership, responsibilities and guidelines.
- Meeting schedules are determined a year in advance
- Agendas and relevant materials are distributed two weeks before the board meetings.
- Board meetings are focused and stimulate broad participation by members.
- Tasks are achieved in a timely manner.