

## BOARD AND STAFF PARTNERSHIP

*“While respecting the division of labor, exceptional boards become allies with the chief executive in pursuit of the mission. They understand that they and the chief executive bring complementary ingredients to the governance partnership that, when combined, are greater than the sum of its parts.”*

The Source, BoardSource (2005)

The existence of a healthy partnership between the board and the executive staff leadership is critically important to the overall success of a nonprofit organization. When leadership is shared, the collective strengths, talents, skills and expertise of everyone involved are elevated to successfully achieve the mission. The nonprofit organization becomes stronger, healthier and more responsive to the community.

The board of directors is the legal body of the organization, while the chief executive is responsible for daily management. As a result, the board and chief executive are both focused on achieving the mission in very different ways. A constructive partnership is built when there are appropriate expectations and clearly communicated responsibilities for both. Ultimately, the board would have great difficulty making well-rounded decisions without the input from the chief executive while the chief executive cannot effectively lead the organization without a strong, engaged board of direction. This constructive partnership is built on knowing when to act alone, when to help – or ask for help, and trusting the partner to do the same.

The chart below gives some guidance on specific responsibilities for the board and for the chief executive in several key areas:

Board Responsibility	Chief Executive Responsibility
<b>Mission</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes, and periodically reviews and updates as necessary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides key input on the development and update of the mission.</li> </ul>
<b>Oversight</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafts and/or approves broad policies to guide and protect the organization, board, and staff.</li> <li>• Monitors that all legal requirements get proper attention.</li> <li>• Hires the chief executive and delegates to him or her the daily operations.</li> <li>• Expects regular and objective reports from staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversees daily operations.</li> <li>• Hires staff and delegates operational responsibilities to them.</li> <li>• Regularly reports to the board of directors; shares both good and bad news with the board.</li> <li>• Ensures contract compliance.</li> <li>• Regularly reports to funding agencies.</li> </ul>

<b>Planning &amp; Evaluation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopts an overall strategic mindset that focuses on the big picture of what matters most.</li> <li>• Participates in creating the organization's strategic plan.</li> <li>• Assesses trends in the field to determine future of the organization.</li> <li>• Via staff reports, evaluates the organization's progress towards goals.</li> <li>• Evaluates its own performance regularly.</li> <li>• Evaluates the performance of the chief executive and determines appropriate composition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures that strategic planning happens with the board's appropriate involvement.</li> <li>• Lends expertise to the board in developing strategic plan and goals.</li> <li>• Leads operational planning and approves plans for the staff.</li> <li>• Ensures that a process for staff performance exists, approves staff compensation and evaluates his or her own performance.</li> <li>• Provides regular reports to the board on agency progress.</li> </ul>
<b>Finance</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes sure adequate financial expertise is on the board.</li> <li>• Establishes overall fiscal policies and ensures appropriate internal controls.</li> <li>• Approves the annual budget and carefully monitors the financial reports.</li> <li>• Hires an auditor and reviews the audit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepares the annual budget and provides the board with regular financial statements.</li> <li>• Handles the daily financial operations and monitors cash flow.</li> <li>• Defines financial policies and procedures for all daily money transactions.</li> </ul>
<b>Fundraising</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafts gift-acceptance policies and personal giving guidelines for board members.</li> <li>• Actively participates in the overall fundraising efforts.</li> <li>• Individually contributes financially to the organization.</li> <li>• Identify new resources and cultivate donors.</li> <li>• During capital campaigns, takes a lead in securing the campaigns success.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafts (with staff and development committee) a fundraising plan.</li> <li>• Oversees the implementation of the fundraising plan and involves the board in fundraising activities.</li> <li>• Acts as the main representative of the organization and communicator with major funders.</li> <li>• Identifies new resources.</li> <li>• Tracks donations and acknowledges all donations.</li> <li>• Writes grants.</li> </ul>
<b>Board Development</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the governance or board development committee, ensures that the board's composition reflects the organization's needs.</li> <li>• Actively cultivates new board recruits.</li> <li>• Drafts specific policies and ensures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assigns staff to support board committees and other activities.</li> <li>• Identifies potential new board members.</li> <li>• Assists in training and orienting board members.</li> <li>• Orient new board members to the</li> </ul>

bylaws are applicable. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify training needs; incorporates governance training, including orientation, into regular board schedule.</li> <li>• Orients new board members to the work of the board.</li> </ul>	organization.
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It is important to recognize that there is a great deal of overlap and shared leadership responsibilities. The board takes the lead when it:

- Defines policies that put the mission into action.
- Hires, supports, and evaluates the chief executive.
- Opens doors to fundraising in the community.
- Monitors fiscal management, approves the budgets, and ensures there's an audit.
- Selects, recruits, and orients new board members

The chief executive takes the lead when he/she:

- Proposes policy questions for the board's consideration.
- Hires, supervises, and motivates staff.
- Develops and implements programs.
- Managing daily operations and finances.

Board and staff share the lead when they:

- Develop a strategic plan.
- Create a fundraising plan and strategies.
- Initiate and implement evaluations.
- Prepare for board meetings.

**Sources:**

Action Handbook for Boards, Support Center for Nonprofit Management/National Minority AIDS Council. 1995

Building the Governance Partnership: The Chief Executive's Guide to Getting the Best from the Board, Kathleen A. McGinnis, and Sherrill K. Williams. BoardSource

Dividing Duties Between Board and Staff, Nonprofit Network

The Source, BoardSource, 2006.