

Year End Board Planning

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Now is a good time for your board to reflect on the past and plan for tomorrow

As the calendar year starts to wind down, nonprofits will be working at a hectic pace to finalize annual fundraising appeals and other tasks that must be wrapped up before the start of the new year. Included in the long list of year-end “to-dos” should be ensuring that your board is engaged, prepped and ready to go for the year ahead.

Year’s end is a natural time for the board to both celebrate organizational wins and review missteps or unmet goals of the past year. Consider assigning board members to certain initiatives and objectives within the strategic plan and ask that they meet with the staff responsible for those areas. Not only will this provide board members the opportunity to engage with staff but also to further understand the activities that support the strategic plan and the progress being made toward organizational goals. Where there has been success, board members can personally acknowledge and commend staff. Where there has been a lack of progress, board members can gain a better understanding of existing challenges and what adjustments are needed to get back on track.

Governance practices to consider for end of year

When looking toward the next year, it is important to either create or update the board calendar to include a comprehensive overview of the year. To help keep the board on track and provide them with a visual reminder of what the goals are for the year, the calendar should go beyond just identifying board and committee meeting dates. The following are some of the additional items to include when building a board calendar:

- Priority agenda items for each board meeting
- Dates for fundraising campaigns and events
- Board planning retreats
- New board member orientation
- Evaluation of CEO
- Other volunteer opportunities within the organization
- Board review/nominations

Make the calendar as exhaustive of a resource as possible, knowing that dates can be adjusted by the board, as needed.

Depending on when your nominations process occurs, end of year can be a beneficial time to either formally or informally review board composition. Throughout the year, board members should be encouraged to watch for potential recruits, so it's important to review what they should look for in a new board member candidate. Organizations should determine what additional skill sets are needed and in what areas the board needs to diversify. Organizations should also evaluate whether the current board committees are serving the needs of the organization or whether a committee should be added or dissolved.

Do you need to create or review the organization's expectations of board members regarding time and financial commitment? Consider a menu of items for the next year with choices that your board members can choose from. A board member may not have the means to donate a required amount, but they could choose to help raise that amount from personal or business connections. They could choose to either volunteer at an event or sponsor a table. Their additional time commitment might include a choice between making personal phone calls to donors, writing personal notes on a fundraising appeal or connecting the organization to potential donors in the community.

By this point in the year, the budget has most likely been approved, but the finance committee should schedule a time after the new year to begin reviewing the organization's Form 990 or meet with auditors to review completed financial statements. If your organization has investments, the finance committee should review investment performance and consider any changes that might need to be made to the investment policy.

Because year end is already demanding, don't expect to accomplish everything in the last few months of the year. Prioritize which tasks offer the best chance for the board to increase its effectiveness and

engagement as the new year begins.

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