
12 March 2015

Dear Friends,

Warm greetings from sunny Santa Cruz!

We are writing today with resources for working with boards. Almost every organization has a board. In fact, boards are required in many countries. But boards can take many different forms. At some organizations, the board rarely meets and is not truly guiding the organization's work. In other organizations, the board is over-involved, to the detriment of the organization.

An organization with an active, motivated, and well-connected board is often poised for success. We hope the resources below can help your organization nurture this kind of board.

Sincerely,

The Firelight Team

(Resource) Improving the Effectiveness of the Board - from HelpAge

(Resource) Dealing with Typical Governance Problems - from HelpAge

(Resource) Board and Staff Responsibilities

(Accepting Applications) Laureate Global Fellowship - YouthActionNet

(Call for Proposals) Urban Youth Fund - UN Habitat

(Resource) Improving the Effectiveness of the Board - from HelpAge

Some years ago, HelpAge produced an excellent manual called "Strengthening Your Organization". We have not been able to find a link online to this document, but have excerpted some relevant sections below.

Board members need information and support from the organisation to enable them to fulfil their role effectively. Both board members and staff are responsible for ensuring that they receive this. A thorough induction and proper preparation for meetings are key to ensuring the effectiveness of the board.

Complete an induction

All new board members should go through an induction (see below). Long-serving board members will also benefit from a periodic 're-induction'.

Understand the organisation

Board members should ensure that they know and understand the following:

- the mission of the organisation
- the constitution and any other formal documents
- the areas and programmes within which the organisation works
- the organisation's management and staff structure
- the board's procedures.

Prepare for committee meetings

Board members should ensure that they are sent committee papers well in advance of the meeting. They should read the papers and identify important issues for discussion or comment.

Ask the right questions

One of the most important functions of a board member is to ask the right questions. Board members should not be afraid to ask questions and press for explanations, drawing on their own expertise where relevant. They will learn what to look for in a budget or work plan, and should feel free to ask for information which they think will help in monitoring the organisation, rather than rely on staff to decide what information is relevant.

Take action if necessary

If a board member becomes worried about a particular aspect of the organisation, it is essential that they take action and not keep the concern to themselves. Some matters can be discussed with a senior staff member or the chair. Sometimes it may be appropriate to express the concern publicly at a committee meeting.

Establish good relationships with staff

Board members should ensure that they have a chance to meet and support staff, for example by visiting the office. Good board members can really boost staff morale. There can often be tensions relating to respective roles and responsibilities of board members and staff. Board members should take the lead in establishing a sense of partnership, but also remember that their role is in governance, and let staff get on with their day-to-day responsibilities.

Get advice if necessary

Board members should ensure that they get the right advice, support, and training to govern the organisation effectively.

Inducting new board members

It is essential that board members receive a thorough induction, including written information and an orientation session. The purpose of an induction is to ensure that board members fully understand the organisation and their role in it. Hold the orientation as a separate event, especially where there are several new board members, and prior to the new members' first board meeting, as this will help them to participate fully as quickly as possible. Staff and experienced board members can present the structure and work of

the organisation, while the chair or president should explain the role and responsibilities of the board. Arrange for board members to spend some time at the office so that they can meet the staff and understand the way the organisation works.

Invite new board members to introduce themselves at their first meeting, explaining any previous involvement with the organisation, what skills and experience they bring, and why they decided to join the board. If board members are unable to commit the time to a separate induction event, then it can be held as part of a board meeting – but do they really have time to be a board member if this is the case?

The induction pack

Prepare an induction pack to give both to all new board members and to longer-serving members whose interest and commitment may have waned. The pack should include:

- the history of the organisation, including when it was founded, its original purpose, and any significant changes of direction it has taken
- statements about the organisation's values, mission and objectives
- information about the organisation's current work, detailing sources of funding and major donors and including copies of any recent newsletters
- details of other board members, including their addresses and telephone and fax numbers (if possible include brief career summaries of all members to highlight their expertise in a particular area)
- the structure of the organisation (an organisation chart and list of key staff with job title and a clear indication of their responsibilities)
- most recent annual report and accounts for the previous two years !a copy of the constitution, and any other governing documents !roles and responsibilities, and job descriptions of board members !a recent set of board papers and minutes
- board and committee structure !the director's job description !major policy documents !dates of forthcoming meetings.

(Resource) Dealing with Typical Governance Problems - from HelpAge

The two main governance problems are either a weak board, or one that is too involved in the day-to-day work of the organisation.

A weak board will result in an organisation controlled by the staff and volunteers, with no monitoring of progress, performance or financial management. There is a very real risk of individuals pursuing their own ambitions and agendas, rather than focusing on the beneficiaries. The organisation will eventually lose its credibility, and it will be more difficult to secure funding.

A board that becomes too involved in the day-to-day work of the organisation, trying to control all aspects, will cause conflicts with the professional staff. The result is often an

organisation which achieves far less than its potential, and it is the beneficiaries who lose out. This problem typically occurs when organisations are in transition from being run by volunteers to employing staff. Some board members, particularly those who helped found the organisation, may have trouble letting go of control of the day-to-day work.

Possible solutions to governance problems

1. The chair of a board that has become weak, or the director of the organisation, could convene a study day or retreat to help the board redefine its role and to help members understand what is expected of them. A team-building workshop, supported by an independent facilitator, could help the board members to work together more effectively.
2. If your organisation has been run by volunteers and is beginning to employ staff, discuss and acknowledge the changing role of the board. Board members' roles in monitoring the organisation will change, in order to allow staff the independence and authority to perform their jobs effectively. Again, a retreat or workshop may be useful.
3. Your chair (or president) and the director (or chief executive) should devote time to ensuring that they have a good working relationship, clarifying areas of responsibility and establishing good communications. A good relationship between them is crucial to the effectiveness of an organisation.
4. Write job descriptions for board members, as well as staff, which define roles and responsibilities, so that everyone is clear about what is expected of them.
5. To help re-establish an ineffective board, prepare induction packs and orientation sessions to re-introduce members to the organisation. Such packs and sessions should also be provided for all new board members.
6. Consider using an external consultant to analyse problems with individual board members and staff, if problems within the organisation are deep-rooted and there has been a breakdown in relations with staff. Discuss the consultant's recommendations at a workshop and agree a way forward.
7. Decide how long you want individuals to remain on the board – this should be written into your constitution. Seek new members with specific skills, but plan ahead so that you are not changing more than half the board at one time to ensure continuity in the governance of the organisation. Make sure that all your new board members have an effective induction.

(Resource) Board and Staff Responsibilities

As highlighted in the above resource, it is often wise to clearly define the roles of board and staff to avoid confusion or conflict. The Free Management Library (<http://managementhelp.org>) provides resources on this and many other management topics.

The Free Management Library suggests the following activities to be done by board, staff

or jointly. Ultimately, the responsibility for the various activities depends very much on the life-cycle of the organization -- young organizations often have working Boards that are involved in day-to-day activities, while older organizations have Boards that attend exclusively to top-level policies and plans. This document should be reviewed by board members to finalize roles. The original author of this document is unknown.

PLANNING:

Direct the process of planning	Board
Provide input to long range goals	Joint
Approve long range goals	Board
Formulate annual objectives	Staff
Approve annual objectives	Board
Prepare performance reports on achievement of goals and objectives	Staff
Monitor achievement of goals and objectives	Joint

PROGRAMMING:

Assess stakeholder (customers, community) needs	Staff
Train volunteer leaders (nonprofits only)	Staff
Oversee evaluation of products, services and programs	Board
Maintain program records; prepare program reports	Staff
Prepare preliminary budget	Staff
Finalize and approve budget	Board
See that expenditures are within budget during the year	Staff
Solicit contributions in fundraising campaigns (nonprofits)	Board
Organize fundraising campaigns (nonprofits)	Staff
Approve expenditures outside authorized budget	Board
Insure annual audit of organization accounts	Board

PERSONNEL:

Employ Chief Executive	Board
Direct work of the staff	Staff
Hire and discharge staff member	Staff
Decision to add staff (nonprofit)	Board
Settle discord among staff	Staff

COMMUNITY RELATIONS:

Interpret organization to community	Board
Write news stories	Staff
Provide organization linkage with other organizations	Joint

BOARD COMMITTEES:

Appoint committee members	Board
Call Committee Chair to urge him/her into action	Board
Promote attendance at Board/Committee meetings	Joint
Recruit new Board members	Board

Plan agenda for Board meetings	Joint
Take minutes at Board meetings	Joint
Plan and propose committee organization	Joint
Prepare exhibits, material and proposals for Board and Committees	Staff
Sign legal documents	Board
Follow-up to insure implementation of Board and Committee decisions	Staff
Settle clash between Committees	Board

You can see the original list here: <http://bit.ly/1GUAwl>

(Accepting Applications) Laureate Global Fellowship - YouthActionNet

Sponsored by the Sylvan/Laureate Foundation, the Laureate Global Fellowship annually recognizes 20 young leaders who have pioneered solutions to urgent challenges in their communities and beyond. Fellows develop leadership expertise and deepen their impact through a dynamic, yearlong learning experience, and join a network of over 1,000 change-makers like them who continue to benefit from learning opportunities and connections throughout their social change careers.

Eligibility

Applicants must be:

18 – 29 years old as of October 1, 2015

Founders or co-founders of existing ventures with at least one year of impact

Fluent in English (applications must be completed in English)

Key Dates

Application opens on February 11, 2015

Applications must be submitted by March 25, 2015 at midnight EDT

All applicants will be notified of their status by June 12, 2015

The leadership training and public event will take place October 2-8, 2015 in Washington, DC

How to apply

Please apply through YouthActionNet's 2015 Laureate Global Fellowship Online

Application (<http://bit.ly/18R9EOH>). While online applications are preferred, there is a

Microsoft Word version of the application for those who require it due to limited bandwidth.

Click here to access the Word application (<http://bit.ly/1wWsTeA>).

All selected Fellows receive:

- 7 day immersive leadership training and retreat in Washington, DC (October 2015). Costs including US visa fee, airfare, ground transportation, accommodations, and group meals covered by the International Youth Foundation.

- Yearlong fellowship experience including coaching/mentoring, advocacy, and networking opportunities
 - Access to our global network of 1000+ change makers worldwide
 - A lifetime of continued learning and support offered to all alumni
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(Call for Proposals) Urban Youth Fund - UN Habitat

UN-Habitat launched a call for applications for the Urban Youth Fund. In its seventh year, the Fund provides grants to projects led by young people aged 15-32 years who are piloting innovative approaches to employment, good urban governance, shelter, secure tenure and risk rehabilitation.

The Fund aims to assist youth-led organizations in designing and implementing projects that will contribute to sustainable urbanization in the developing world. Furthermore, the Fund seeks to gain insight from successful grassroots youth projects and create greater awareness of the need for youth mainstreaming in development policies and strategies.

This year's call for proposals strongly encourages applicants to ensure their projects include the following criteria:

1. A strategy to work with cities and or local authorities in order to maximize their ability at making an impact at the policy level. One of the key objectives of UN-Habitat's youth programme is to enhance the capacity of local authorities to mainstream youth issues into their programmes and services.
2. The inclusion of the Human Rights Based Approach during projects' implementation. The Human Rights Based Approach will be presented as a cross cutting issue toward the various UN- Habitat thematic areas in the projects' goals. This is with the aim to empowering people to know and claim their rights. This also serves to increase the ability and accountability of individuals and institutions that are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling these rights. For more information on Human Rights Based Approach please visit the Human Rights page (<http://bit.ly/17ScUlg>).

UN-Habitat invites young people based in cities or towns from the developing world to apply for grants from the fund.

The application is open from 15 February to 15 April 2015.

To apply please visit: www.unhabitatyouthfund.org

Additional information on the Urban Youth Fund is available here: <http://bit.ly/1zYZ5il>

As part of the Firelight Foundation's Capacity Building Program, Firelight provides "Newsflashes" to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. Past editions of the Firelight Newsflash can be found on our website:

<http://www.firelightfoundation.org/resources/newsflash>

We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at newsletter@firelightfoundation.org

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