

Checklist for Building a Strong Board

Mission

- Do board members understand what the organization does and its impact?
- Are board members committed to staying focused on the mission?
- Are board members willing to reevaluate the mission from time to time?

Leadership

- Does the Board Chair partner with the CEO to pursue the organization's strategic priorities? Do they set a positive tone for the board and model effective leadership behaviors?
- Do board members have the vision to help support the CEO in managing change?
- Are board members among the largest and most consistent donors of the organization?
- Has the board done a strategic plan for the organization within the past 3-5 years?
- Is the board willing and able to frame the key issues and decisions that need to be made around challenges and opportunities?
- Is the board willing to challenge the senior staff leadership on their plans and recommendations? Will they ask tough questions?
- Is the board using committees and task forces effectively to execute the strategic plan?
- Does the board act as ambassadors for the organization with partners and the community?
- Does board leadership create the conditions for honesty and trust among board members?

Process

- Does the board have a robust recruiting process that provides a strong pipeline of mission-driven, diverse, and culturally competent prospects who can support the strategic priorities?
- Does the board have a succession planning process that prepares the next generation of leaders and provides a smooth transition for new board leaders?
- Is there a process for budgeting linked to the strategic plan that provides for reserves?
- Are the committees and meeting agendas designed to focus on the organization's strategic priorities and board engagement?

Culture

- Is there a culture of generosity throughout the board? Do they understand they are a critical factor in any successful fundraising campaign?
- Is there a strong ethics and conflict of interest policy in place that is enforced?
- Is there a willingness to constructively debate important and difficult issues among the board?
- Are board members actively engaged and contributing their expertise and knowledge at meetings or other board activities?
- Do board members provide access to their network of relationships to further the mission?
- Do board members request a meaningful, appropriate, and timely information flow from staff?
- Do board members value, respect, and trust their fellow board members?

Accountability

- Does the board evaluate the CEO annually and provide the necessary support for the CEO's leadership development?
- Does the board assess its own performance regularly and have clear accountability measures that are self-enforced?
- Does the board provide strong financial oversight and fiscal responsibility? Do they make tough decisions to avoid deficit spending?
- Has 100% of the board made a cash donation that is meaningful to each board member?
- Does the board require the CEO to have a succession plan for the senior leadership staff?
- Does the board provide transparency in its decision-making and the organization's finances?
- Does the board actively assess and manage risk associated with the organization's activities?
- Does the board provide legal oversight and compliance?
- Is the board large enough to fulfill its roles and responsibilities for oversight? Is it small enough for each board member to understand their role and feel engaged?

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