

Is Your Board Suffering From Burnout?

If you're a board member or an executive who attends board meetings frequently, take this simple quiz created by BoardSource to find out whether your nonprofit board is in need of rejuvenation.

1. Does the same small group of people tend to do most or all of the work of the board?
2. Have any board members missed half or more of your board meetings in the past year?
3. Has your board failed to reach a quorum at any board meeting in the last 12 months?
4. Does your board struggle to recruit and retain talented, skilled, and diverse volunteers?
5. Do board members make commitments but often fail to fulfill those promises?
6. Do board meetings last longer than planned?
7. Does your board automatically renew a member's term if that volunteer is willing to again?
8. Does your board have no maximum number of years that a volunteer can serve on the Board?
9. Does your organization either move from crisis to crisis or keep addressing the same issues over and over?
10. Are board committees functioning less than optimally?
11. Does your board struggle to find good leaders who are willing and qualified to be chair?
12. Do board members complain that they're asked to do things they never expected to do?
13. Does the agenda for board meetings look the same meeting after meeting?
14. Has it been longer than two years since the board formally assessed itself with a written tool and had frank discussion about the results?
15. Does your board suffer from boring meetings?

Results

If you answered yes to four or fewer questions: Congratulations, your board is engaged and on the right track to being a strategic asset for your organization. Adopt a "culture of continuous learning" to further board members' knowledge about the organization they serve and what effective governance means. Such boards hold orientations for new members and regularly evaluate their own performance. No matter how your organization scored on this quiz, it's always a good idea to assess your board's engagement and performance at least once a year, perhaps at an annual board retreat. Your organization will benefit from being sensitive to the possibility of trustee burnout and taking steps to proactively address it.

If you answered yes to five to nine questions: Your board is at a tipping point, and there may be one or more problematic issues to address.

If you answered yes to 10 or more questions: Your board is in need of a formal self-assessment

First, boards that don't follow effective meeting practices and fail to make good use of board members' time and skills risk losing their engagement. Ensure that your board meetings include time for discussing strategic issues beyond routine, administrative matters. Second, board members may simply be exhausted. Now might be the time to take a hard look at each board member's tenure. Are there volunteers who should be rotated off the board? Would the board benefit from an infusion of fresh ideas and energy that new members can bring?

Do a board matrix: List the skills, demographics, and tenure of your board, and decide whether the board you have is the board that your organization needs. If you don't have an active governance committee to lead the way, maybe it is time to form one. For a simple board matrix and more ideas to refresh your board, use the Board Building Cycle: Nine Steps to Finding, Recruiting, and Engaging Nonprofit Board Members.

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Check out The Board Building Cycle - Finding, Engaging, And Strengthening Non Profit Board Members

Orientation to a CEO's Board-Building Cycle

Step 1

IDENTIFY board needs (skills, knowledge, perspective, connections, etc.), required to implement the strategic plan. What do we have? What is missing? Identify sources of board members with the needed characteristics (refer to board matrix).

Step 2

CULTIVATE potential board members. Get them interested in Art with Heart and keep them informed on our progress.

Step 3

RECRUIT prospects. Describe why a prospective member is wanted and needed. Describe expectations and responsibilities of board members and don't minimize requirements. Invite questions and elicit their interest and preparedness to serve.

Step 4

ORIENT new board members to the organization—program, history, pressing issues, finances, organization chart—as well as to other board members and key staff members.

Step 5

ACTIVATE board members. Discover their interests and availability. Involve them in committees or task forces. Assign them a "board buddy." Solicit feedback. Hold everyone accountable. Express appreciation for work well done.

Step 6

EDUCATE the board. Provide information concerning our mission. Promote exploration of issues facing the organization. Don't hide difficulties. Celebrate accomplishments.

Step 7

ROTATE board members. Establish and use term limits. Do not automatically reelect for an additional term; consider the board's needs and the board member's performance. Explore advisability of resigning members who are not active. Develop new leadership.

Step 8

EVALUATE the board and individual board member. Engage the board in assessing its own performance. Identify ways in which to improve. Encourage individual self-assessment.

Step 9

CELEBRATE! Recognize even small victories and incremental progress. Appreciate individual contributions to the board the organization and the community. Make room for humor.

