

# THE BOARD MEMBER BOOK SHELF

## Recommended reading for Board Members of Nonprofit Organization

Bibliography & short reviews culled from **The Nonprofit Bookshelf**,

A joint project of the Nonprofit Management Association and the Southern California Center for Nonprofit Management.

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### OVERVIEW BOOK

#### **Developing Dynamic Boards: A Proactive Approach to Building Nonprofit Boards of Directors,**

By James M. Hardy

Erwin, Tennessee: Essex Press, 1990. 194 pages, hard cover

ISBN: 0-930381-02-5

Price: \$24.95 + shipping. Order from Essex Press. (See ordering information below.)

Experience has proven to James Hardy that boards of directors can and must be developed. To achieve this end, he has written a helpful, hands-on book that is full of exhibits, worksheets, evaluation tools, and examples. This practical work looks at all elements of board development with a good understanding of the human considerations with which board chairs must always work. Information is well organized, accessible, and clear. There is a good balance between theory and advice that can be readily applied to any board of directors.

The book begins with an overview of board roles, responsibilities, and functions. It then examines all the key components of board development: board assessment and evaluation; recruitment, orientation, training and education of board members; organization and committees; operations and meetings; and decision-making. Wherever action is recommended, a framework or a form is provided. As an example of this approach, the section on board/staff roles is accompanied by two tools: "Who does what? Board-Staff Responsibilities and Relationships" and "Dimensions of Excellence: Agency Board-Chief Executive Functioning." On occasion the evaluation forms are too involved, and the book is handicapped by a poorly designed table of contents. Overall, however, this is a positive and practical examination of board development.

"...this book is based on the proposition that board chairs and chief executives are responsible for developing boards of directors -- building them, if you will -- into dynamic, fully functioning and very human mechanisms that provide organizational direction and policy understanding."

James Hardy, **Developing Dynamic Boards: A Proactive Approach to Building Nonprofit Boards of Directors**

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### SPECIAL TOPIC CURRENT GOVERNANCE MODEL

#### **Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations,**

by John Carver

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1990. 266 pages, hard cover

ISBN: 1-55542-231-4

Price: \$27.95 + shipping. Order from Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers. (See ordering information below.)

In this justly celebrated book, John Carver takes a candid look at how badly many boards fulfill their governance role and analyzes the failure of common prescriptions for boards. Readers will find the first part of the book exhilarating as Carver takes on the "anecdotal wisdom" that characterizes most board literature. Carver goes on to develop a highly structured approach where boards focus on "ends, not means," and where boards focus on results and staff have latitude in program selection, design, and budget. In this model, boards adopt policies about what staff can't do, not about what they should do. For example, the board adopts limits on circumstances in which the executive can incur organizational debt, rather than approving the securing of a loan.

Unfortunately, the brilliance of Carver's critiques is not matched by his own prescriptions. For example, he characterizes board approval of the annual budget as little more than an empty exercise. But his alternative approach substitutes a directive to staff to develop a budget that does not "contain too little detail, plan expenditure of more funds than are conservatively projected, or deviate materially from board-stated priorities." Read this book for its wonderful critique, but give careful thought to how to implement your own

remedies. The model presented can potentially devalue into platitudes and disengagement of the board. Carver's work provides a much-needed shaking up of board literature and practice. Discussing Carver can be one of the most provocative and engaging discussions a board can have. Carver has moved the field forward, but there is still work to be done.

"The task, then, with respect to board oversight...is to create a workable set of policies that constrain or limit executive latitude."

John Carver, **Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations**

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## **SPECIAL TOPIC - ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING AT THE ISSUES**

**Boards From Hell**, by Susan M. Scribner

Long Beach, California: Scribner & Associates, 1991. 60 pages, soft cover

Price: \$15.00 plus \$1.00 shipping. Order from Scribner & Associates. Also available on disk with *How to Ask for Money Without Fainting*, \$59.00 + tax + shipping. Order from ORCA Knowledge Systems. (See ordering information below.)

The responsibilities and complexity of nonprofit boards of directors can be very daunting. Here is another way of looking at it. Any board that is unsure how to remedy its weaknesses will find this book to be a great source of practical wisdom. Scribner provides an opportunity to step back, see the humor in the situation, and then adopt various strategies and actions that are not only plausible but also achievable. Using a combination of pointed but lighthearted humor, Scribner identifies various categories and characteristics of problem boards. She then lists the four or five immediate tasks to get each board of directors back on track and assuming the appropriate leadership roles. Every suggestion, instruction, or problem-solving mechanism can be initiated by any nonprofit organization. Scribner makes clear that even a "Phantom Board" or a "Bored Board" can become an effective organizational body.

Each of the solutions that Scribner proposes covers a fundamental issue of board management. Some questions answered are: "What is the role of the Chair of the Board?" and "What is Policy?" Included are standards of board performance and descriptions of committees, along with advice on recruiting board members and matching expectations between board members and the organization. The book includes an excellent chapter on strategic planning. Scribner outlines the process for a board to follow to define planning methods, to get back to basics, and to identify criteria for organizational success. There are detailed agendas for meetings, sample worksheets to complete during the process, and help on creating fundraising and program plans as part of the overall strategic plan. The message behind this lively and practical presentation is clear. It may take time and patience, but it is possible to fix a board and to govern well.

"Don't get me wrong -- I love Boards! I love it when they work well; I'm frustrated when they don't!"

Susan M. Scribner, **Boards From Hell**

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## **SPECIAL TOPIC - BOARD AND ORGANIZATION LIFECYCLES**

**Board Passages: Three Key Stages in a Nonprofit Board's Life Cycle**, by Karl Mathiasen

Governance Series, 7. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1990. 20 pages, booklet

ISBN: 0-925299-09-X

Price: Non-members, \$11.00 + shipping; members, \$8.25 + shipping. Order from National Center for Nonprofit Boards. (See ordering information below.)

Rather than describe an ideal board in a static organization, the author proposes stages in which the functions, culture and composition of boards differ as the organization evolves through various stages. Mathiasen clearly presents the characteristics of each type of board and clearly specifies that not all organizations will or should pass through each stage. This is a very articulate presentation based on the idea of a changing board in a changing organization. Recommended to all board members.

"Just as nonprofits pass through identifiable organizational stages, so do nonprofit boards...The first of these is the organizing board, the second is the governing board, and the third is the institutional board."

Karl Mathiasen III, **Board Passages: Three Key Stages in a Nonprofit Board's Life Cycle**

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## **SPECIAL TOPIC - ORIENTATION TO THE BOARD & COMMITTEES**

**On Board: Guiding Principles for Trustees of Not-for-Profit Organizations**, by Robert W. Crawford  
Santa Fe, New Mexico: Western States Arts Federation, 1991. 64 pages, booklet  
ISBN: 0-9611710-5-7

Price: \$7.50 + shipping. Order from Western States Arts Federation. (See ordering information below.)

This excellent guide provides board members with a sound introduction to board responsibilities, composition, and structure. It is written in a conversational, approachable style and can be read in an hour. Chapters cover board responsibilities and functions, expectations for board members, officer responsibilities, board size, elections and terms, and board meetings. The description of board committees is excellent and comprehensive. Also included are sample articles of incorporation and bylaws. While supplementary reading will be required for some topics such as legal responsibilities, this is a fine introduction at a very reasonable price.

"Of one thing I am absolutely convinced. There is not, nor should there be, any mystery about trusteeship or the governance of not-for-profit corporations...Healthy and constructive relationships among boards and staffs can be achieved and maintained if they are based on the exercise of common sense and courtesy."

Robert W. Crawford, **On Board: Guiding Principles for Trustees of Not-for-Profit Organizations**

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## **SPECIAL TOPIC - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SEARCH AND SELECTION**

**Hiring the Chief Executive: A Practical Guide to the Search and Selection Process**, by Sheila Albert  
Washington, D.C.: National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1993. 28 pages, booklet  
ISBN: 0-925299-27-8

Price: Non-members, \$17.00 + shipping; members, \$12.75 + shipping. Order from National Center for Nonprofit Boards. (See ordering information below.)

This good, basic publication is an excellent guide for a board on hiring a chief executive. It outlines a direct, step-by-step process and provides the necessary tools to get the job done. Provided are specific advice on the search, deciding on priorities, screening resumes and requesting other materials, interviewing, selection, and beginning the new relationship well. Appendices provide a sample timeline, job description, letters, interview questions, and rating sheets.

"Hiring a chief executive is probably the most important task the board of a nonprofit organization ever faces."

Sheila Albert, **Hiring the Chief Executive: A Practical Guide to the Search and Selection Process**

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## **SPECIAL TOPIC - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR EVALUATION**

**Board Assessment of the Chief Executive: A Responsibility Essential to Good Governance**, by John W. Nason  
Governance Series, 4. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1990. 16 pages, booklet  
ISBN: 0-925299-04-9

Price: Non-members, \$11.00 + shipping; members, \$8.25 + shipping. Order from National Center for Nonprofit Boards. (See ordering information below.)

This easy-to-read booklet will encourage busy board members to initiate evaluations. It urges boards to work with their chief executives to set objectives that will form the basis for evaluation. The cautions, tips and emphasis on humane and regularly scheduled evaluations are particularly useful. Boards will want to consider going beyond the material provided here. Most of the evaluation criteria offered are the types of activities in which directors are engaged, rather than criteria for the performance of organizations as a whole. The suggested assessment relies on board opinion or use of a consultant without considering other important constituencies. This booklet will give a positive start to the process, but supplementary reading is recommended.

"The three cardinal rules for assessment are: do it; do it in an humane and sensitive way; and make it a constructive, regular exercise for the chief executive, for the board, and for the organization."

## **SPECIAL TOPIC - FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

**Understanding Nonprofit Financial Statements: A Primer for Board Members**, by John Paul Dalsimer  
Governance Series, 8. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1991. 25 pages, booklet  
ISBN: 0-925299-10-3

Price: Non-members, \$11.00 + shipping; members, \$8.25 + shipping. Order from National Center for Nonprofit Boards. (See ordering information below.)

This practical overview of nonprofit accounting concepts, financial statements and ratio analysis is an excellent orientation handbook for board members. The information is brief, but clearly presented. It stresses a proactive approach and encourages board members to understand and ask questions about financial matters. The emphasis on using interim reports for management decision-making is particularly useful. This is an admirable attempt to cover a vast amount of material in a concise format. Inevitably, some readers will require additional references.

" A well-prepared monthly statement...should provide the board with the financial information it needs to govern the organization in most situations."

John Paul Dalsimer, **Understanding Nonprofit Financial Statements: A Primer for Board Members**

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## **SPECIAL TOPIC - LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

**The Legal Obligations of Nonprofit Boards: A Guidebook for Board Members**, by Jacqueline Covey Leifer and Michael B. Glomb

Washington, D.C.: National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1992. 56 pages, booklet  
ISBN: 0-925299-21-9

Price: Non-members, \$30.00 + shipping; members, \$22.50 + shipping. Order from National Center for Nonprofit Boards. (See ordering information below.)

This clearly written booklet provides an excellent orientation for new board members. It presents a general overview of the major laws, which affect nonprofits, with particular emphasis on lobbying and liability. The generic description of state laws should be examined in light of specific state requirements. The price is high for this general material.

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## **SPECIAL TOPIC - BOARD MEETINGS**

**10 Minutes to Better Board Meetings**, published by Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Western Region

San Francisco: Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Western Region, 1994. 28 pages, soft cover

Price: Non-members, \$15.00 + shipping; members, \$11.25 + shipping. Order from National Center for Nonprofit Boards. (See ordering information below.)

This highly focused, well-organized handbook gives very specific attention to the most important issues related to all types of meetings. It is a guide to leading and participating in meetings, from preparation to follow-up. Perfect for the new board chair or member, it is also useful to more experienced individuals who want to sharpen their skills and staff members who work directly with boards and committees. The simple, point-by-point text covers topics including creating the agenda, decision-making, achieving consensus, and handling meeting conflict. Included are a brief and excellent synopsis of Robert's Rules of Order, useful sample agenda and minutes formats, and a comprehensive meeting preparation checklist.

"Dissent is an important element in going beyond the symptoms to uncovering the real issues. Look upon dissent as a means of creating understanding and mutual respect. The trust necessary to build an effective Board is built by allowing dissent to be expressed."

**10 Minutes to Better Board Meetings**

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## **SPECIAL TOPIC - RECRUITMENT**

**How to Recruit Great Board Members**, by Dorian Dodson

Santa Fe, New Mexico: Adolfo Street Publications, 1993. 132 pages, soft cover

ISBN: 0-9632445-1-5

Price: \$14.95 plus shipping. Order from Adolfo Street Publications. (See ordering information below.)

This book presents thorough coverage of all aspects of board recruitment. It stresses the need to know your organization in order to recognize the skills needed in prospective board members, how to sell the organization to these individuals so they accept an invitation to join the board, and how to keep board members motivated and active. It covers the difficult issue of dealing with board members who do not add value to the organization and makes suggestions on other ways to involve people who do not want to join the board. Of particular note is the recommended use of publicity to locate potential board members. Sample letters, brochures, and announcements that can serve this purpose are included. Material presented is thorough and well developed. The author's informal tone makes this enjoyable and easy reading. While appropriate for all boards, this work is particularly appropriate to startup and grassroots boards. The only potential weakness is that the use of clichés and slang may be inappropriate for those preferring a more formal presentation.

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## **ORDERING INFORMATION**

**Please confirm current contacts, pricing, sales tax, and ordering information with publishers.**

Adolfo Street Publications  
2801 Rodeo Road, Suite B-198  
Santa Fe, NM 87505  
Ph: (505) 986-2010

Essex Press  
Route 1, Box 77C  
Erwin, TN 37650  
Ph: (423) 743-7685

Jossey-Bass Publishers  
San Francisco, CA 94104-1310  
Ph: (415) 433-1767 Fax: (415) 433- 0499

National Center for Nonprofit Boards  
1828 L Street, Suite 900  
Washington, DC 20036  
Ph: (202) 452-6262 Fax: (202) 452-6299

ORCA Knowledge Systems  
P. O. Box 290  
San Anselmo, CA 94979  
Ph: (415) 461-4912 Fax: (415) 461-6603

Scribner & Associates  
49 Coronado Avenue  
Long Beach, CA 90803  
Ph: (310) 433-6082

Western States Arts Federation  
236 Montezuma Avenue  
Santa Fe, NM 87501  
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