Board Best Practices

Overview
Below are key benchmarks of high performing boards. Few boards hit every one, but many are easily achieved and all are worth consideration. Within each category, the bullet points are listed, roughly speaking, in order of difficulty (with the easiest-to-achieve benchmarks listed first).

Roles and Responsibilities
- The board includes at least five members.
- Attendance at meetings averages at least 70 percent. A quorum exists at 100 percent of meetings.
- Agenda for board meetings are distributed in advance. Minutes are recorded and approved at each meeting.
- The board draws up a document that explains to members what they are expected to do (member agreements). Committee chairmen are given written job descriptions.
- The board delegates its significant work to committees, each of which is given clearly defined responsibilities and methods by which to measure success.
- The board assesses its own performance annually.

Program
- The board and staff share clearly defined processes for evaluating programmatic success.
- The board conducts an annual written review of the executive director’s performance.

Fundraising
- Every board member makes an annual financial contribution.
- Each board member sets non-financial goals, including numbers and type of solicitations, advocacy efforts and other in-kind support.
- Over 75 percent of board members play an active fundraising role.
- The board approves an annual fundraising plan that outlines goals, persons accountable and timing.
- The board development committee actively drives board and staff to meet the board’s fundraising goals.

Finance
- The board approves an annual budget at least one month prior to each new fiscal year.
- The board monitors fiscal condition at least quarterly via budget-to-actual revenues and expenses, balance sheet and cash flow statement – optimally including variation from previous year(s).
- The board audit committee, constituted as a discrete entity, engages auditors and manages the auditing process

Legal
- The board regularly reviews financial risks and takes suitable action.
- The board has adopted explicit policies for destroying documents, responding to whistleblowers and handling conflicts of interest.
- The board has created clear rules for notifying members immediately of all pending law suits.

Recruitment/Retention
- Board members drive the recruiting process for new board members.
- The board ensures that potential new members satisfy the strategic, skill and experience needs of the organization.
- The board adopts an orientation process that, for example, assigns new members to committees and other roles.
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- The board adopts fixed-schedule elections for officers and members.
- The board adopts transition plans for the organization’s leaders.

Other
- The board has additional policies and documents in place including by-laws and annual calendars.
- The board has discussed whether or not to adopt elections and/or term limits. If elections and/or term limits are adopted, the board has clearly defined processes for ongoing implementation.