The Effective Board

An Overview

An effective board of directors performs its core functions—governance, strategy, and resourcing—with an eye toward fulfilling the organization’s mission and meeting constituent needs. In many ways, the board’s role serves to build a network of relationships within and outside the organization, establishing confidence and credibility among all stakeholders, from its community to its employees to its donors.
Guidance and oversight

A strong board is key to effective organizational performance and leadership. The board must exercise core functions, such as guiding organizational mission and strategy with a focus on the needs of key constituents; selecting the executive and holding her or him accountable for delivery against goals and priorities; assisting in building the organization’s brand and relationships; and helping to mobilize resources, including financial and human capital.

Diverse skills and assets

Boards should emphasize a diverse suite of skills, perspectives, and assets in their composition and recruitment. For CSOs, it is often important to strike a balance between board members with important technical skills, professional expertise (legal, accounting, etc.), high-level strategic insight, and fundraising or networking experience, with board members that provide links and accountability to rural constituents and beneficiaries.

An evolving structure

There is no one-size-fits-all structure for a board. Instead, board size and composition should evolve with an organization. During an organization’s early phase of growth, small and focused boards may be appropriate. Adding new board members and the pace of growth should be carefully considered and managed. As organizations grow, the composition and mixture of skills should change. Boards should also become more institutionalized with more formal processes, new members joining, and a willingness to embrace change.