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## **What are the basic responsibilities of a nonprofit board?**

If you could observe the board meetings of hundreds of nonprofit groups, you would be struck by how different they are in terms of structure, strength of leadership, working style, and relationship with the staff. But despite their diversity, most boards share the same basic duties:

1. *Determine the organization's mission and purposes.* It is the board's responsibility to create and review a statement of mission and purposes that articulates the organization's goals, means, and primary constituents (see Question 3).
2. *Select the chief executive.* When the time has come to hire the first or the next chief executives, boards must reach consensus on the position responsibilities and undertake a careful search to find the most qualified person for the job (see Question 74).

3. *Support and evaluate the chief executive.* The board should ensure that the chief executive has the moral and professional support he or she needs to further the goals of the organization (see Questions 67 and 68).
4. *Ensure effective planning.* Boards must participate actively in an overall planning process and assist in implementing and monitoring the plan's goals (see Question 5).
5. *Monitor and strengthen programs and services.* The board must ensure that current and proposed programs and services are consistent with the organization's mission and monitor their effectiveness (see Question 8).
6. *Ensure adequate financial resources.* One of the board's main responsibilities is to ensure that the organization has adequate financial resources to fulfill its mission (see Questions 4 and 48).
7. *Protect assets and provide financial oversight.* The board must approve the annual budget and ensure that proper financial controls are in place (see Questions 50 and 51).
8. *Build a competent board.* All boards have a responsibility to articulate prerequisites for candidates, orient new members, and periodically and comprehensively evaluate their own performance (see Questions 23, 29, 36, and 37).
9. *Ensure legal and ethical integrity.* The board is ultimately responsible for seeing that legal standards and ethical norms are respected (see Questions 2 and 54).
10. *Enhance the organization's public standing.* The board should clearly articulate to the public the organization's mission, accomplishments, and goals and garner support from the community (see Question 10).

### **SUGGESTED ACTION STEPS**

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1. Board members, write down what you believe are the board's responsibilities. Consolidate the responses in a

summary report for discussion at the next meeting. Try to reach consensus on the distinction between board and staff roles.

2. Board chair, invite a knowledgeable and objective volunteer to read the board's minutes from the past year and then observe two board meetings. Ask this person to summarize, based on his or her observations, the board's actual role (not what someone says it should be). You'll find out quickly whether or not the board is fulfilling its responsibilities.