

## What goes in the board of directors manual?

The foundation of a committed, knowledgeable, and effective board is orientation and education. As an essential companion to orientation and education, every organization should have a thorough, easy-to-use manual that board members can use throughout their terms.

A board manual serves two functions. For the new board member, it is an orientation handbook that provides useful information about the organization, board structure and operations, and fellow board members and staff. For the balance of a member's board service, the manual then becomes an indispensable working tool and a central resource about the organization and the board. Materials can be added and removed to create an up-to-date reference. The board manual is developed by staff in consultation with the board chair and other officers.

Today, the most effective way to share the manual with all board members is to post it on a board member accessible Web site or Intranet. Include a table of contents and clearly divided and labeled sections. Date every item and replace material when necessary.

To develop a working manual that board members use and rely on,

- don't overwhelm new board members with too much information. When several examples are available (e.g., current press clippings/links), include only one.
- keep each item brief. A two-paragraph biography of the chief executive is preferable to a four-page resume, for example.
- use the handbook as a "textbook" during board orientation
- encourage board members to read and ask questions about the material
- ask board members to evaluate the usefulness of the manual each year
- revise the contents or format based on their comments

A thorough board manual can include the following materials. (Remember to keep each item as concise as possible.)

- Board information
  - Board members' listing and bios
  - Board members' terms
  - Board statement of responsibilities
  - Committee and task force job and descriptions
  - Policies pertaining to the board on conflicts of interest, insurance coverage, and travel/meeting expense reimbursements
  - Minutes from recent board meetings
- Historical organizational information
  - Brief written history and/or fact sheet
  - Articles of Incorporation
  - Bylaws
  - IRS determination letter

- Listing of past board members
- Strategic framework
  - Mission and vision statement
  - Strategic framework or plan
  - Current annual operating plan
- Finance and fundraising
  - Prior-year annual report
  - Most recent audit report
  - Current annual budget
  - Form 990
  - Banking resolutions
  - Investment policy
  - Current major funder list
- Staff
  - Staff listing
  - Organizational chart
- Other information
  - Annual calendar
  - Web site information
  - Promotional material (membership brochure, information brochure, advertisements, etc.)