The Center
for nonprofit resources

Board Governance and Best Practice Checklist

Developed in consultation with

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This tool was designed to help nonprofit organizations assess their organizational capacity against a number of best practices recommended by the Center for Nonprofit Resources. Each organization will need to decide for itself what changes, if any, to make in its governance and management policies and practices based on the self-assessment. For more information concerning any of the checklist items below, be sure to visit the Resource Library at www.c4npr.org or call Michelle Klinger at 419-241-9513.

	Yes	No	?	Comments
BOARD GOVERNANCE				
Mission and Vision				
1. Is the current mission statement appropriate and relevant?				
2. Does the organization have a clearly-articulated 5- or 10-year vision?				
3. Has the organization developed clearly-articulated values or guiding principles?				
4. Does the board play a role in developing and regularly reviewing the organization's mission, vision and values?				
5. Are the mission, vision, and values used to drive decisions?				
Bylaws and Other Governance Policies				
6. Does the board have written bylaws in place which are accessible to all and to which the group adheres?				
7. Does the board review the bylaws periodically and ensure adherence?				
8. Has the board adopted a Conflict of Interest Policy providing for the disclosure of potential conflicts and requiring board members to abstain from voting?				
9. Has the board adopted a Code of Ethics that establishes the standards of conduct for board and staff?				
10. Has the board adopted policies for effective governance such as how meeting agendas are established and processes for decision-making?				
11. Are the board's policies easily referenced by all?				
12. Do the bylaws or governance policies provide for limited terms for board members and officers?				
13. Do the bylaws or governance policies provide a process to make nominations and board appointments?				
14. Do the bylaws or governance policies provide a process for removing a board member when necessary?				
15. Do the bylaws or governance policies provide a clear process for handling urgent matters between meetings?				
Board Role and Responsibilities				
16. Are the responsibilities of board members clearly spelled out in a board member position description?				
17. Do all board members demonstrate understanding of and embrace their role as trustees of a nonprofit fiscally responsible to the public and to donors?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
18. Are all board members willing to participate in governance, that is, in making policy-related decisions that guide programs and operational activities?				
19. As a matter of policy, do all board members demonstrate support for the organization's mission?				
20. Do all board members annually self-evaluate their own performance as board members?				
Board and Committee Structure				
21. Are the structure and responsibilities of each committee clearly outlined in written policies?				
22. Are the board's committees active and responsible for the work in their area?				
23. Do all committees, including an Executive Committee, report their activities to the board?				
24. Do committee assignments reflect interests and skills of board members?				
25. Does the committee structure contribute to effective board governance and decision-making?				
26. Are board and staff roles with respect to committee work written, clearly understood, and respected by all?				
Board Culture and Group Dynamics				
27. Is diversity of thought specifically encouraged among board members?				
28. Is adequate time given for free and full discussion of important matters?				
29. When a difference of opinion emerges, is the matter resolved in a way that demonstrates respect for all?				
30. Are the talents of board members used effectively? Do board members enjoy the work/find it meaningful?				
31. Do board members communicate with each other in a way that builds trust and teamwork?				
32. Does the board have an annual retreat? Is it well-attended?				
Board Composition and Development				
33. Is the board comprised of individuals with the requisite skills, characteristics, interests, and experiences to perform the board's functions?				
34. Does the board composition represent the diversity in the community in terms of gender, race, age, geographic distribution, and stakeholder interests?				
35. Does the board have enough productive members to effectively govern and fulfill its responsibilities?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
36. Does the board participate in identifying its board development needs and recruiting potential board members who might meet those needs?				
37. Does each new board member receive a board-led orientation to the organization including its policies, board member expectations, practices, and history?				
38. Do board members participate in a regular self-assessment of the board's governance function?				
Meetings				
39. Are meeting agendas and supporting materials provided to all board members prior to each meeting?				
40. Are all board members prepared for each meeting?				
41. Are board meetings well attended?				
42. Is there a written attendance policy for board meetings with stated consequences for excessive absenteeism?				
43. Are minutes prepared for each meeting which are approved by the board and held in a central location as the corporate record?				
44. Are board meetings focused on policy, planning, evaluation, fiscal responsibility, and other important long-term matters rather than on day-to-day operations?				
45. Does the board chair effectively facilitate to keep each meeting on track and allowing for full discussion of important matters?				
46. Are board meetings productive, making good use of board member time?				
47. Does everyone leave board meetings with a clear understanding of what has been decided and what will happen next?				
48. How can the board improve in the area of board governance?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
FINANCE AND LEGAL MATTERS				
Compliance with State and Federal Laws				
49. Does the board have a legally-registered statutory agent and a current certificate of continuing existence from the Ohio Secretary of State?				
50. Does the board review and certify the accuracy of the IRS 990 (tax return form) each year before it is filed?				
51. Is the organization properly registered with the Ohio Attorney General's office and up to date with filings?				
52. Does the board conduct a periodic review of its compliance with federal and state laws?				
53. Does the board carry and review its general liability and Directors and Officers' liability insurance policies?				
54. Is the board aware of and in compliance with laws governing legislative advocacy and lobbying?				
55. Has the board adopted a legally-compliant Document Retention and Destruction Policy?				
Budgeting and Financial Oversight				
56. Does the board establish an annual budget that reflects the organization's priorities, goals and values?				
57. Is the budget thoroughly discussed by the board before it is adopted?				
58. Does the board regularly review financial reports (Profit & Loss Statement/Balance Sheet) that are timely, understandable, and support fiscal decision-making?				
59. Is the treasurer or another board member actively involved in preparing financial reports for the board?				
60. Does the board discuss discrepancies between the approved budget and actual income or spending?				
61. If a board member is concerned about something in the financial reports, could he or she speak up?				
Audits				
62. [Organizations with annual income above $300,000] Does the board require and review an annual audit by an external accounting firm?				
63. Does the board follow any recommendations in the management letter accompanying the external audit?				
64. [Organizations with less annual income] Does the organization have a policy in place to provide for an internal audit performed by board members who do not ordinarily have access to financial records and accounts?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Financial Policies and Procedures				
65. Does the organization have and follow written financial management policies addressing internal controls, monitoring, whistleblowing, and investments?				
66. Are the organization's financial policies regularly reviewed and approved by the board?				
67. How can the board improve in the area of Finance and Legal Matters?				

MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Board-CEO Relationship				
68. Does the board provide clear goals, expectations, and identified performance indicators for the CEO?				
69. Does the board provide adequate resources and authority as needed to achieve goals and meet stated expectations?				
70. Is there a climate of mutual trust and respect between the board and CEO?				
71. Do board members understand that only the board as a whole or a board designee can direct the CEO?				
72. Does the board provide a regular performance evaluation of the CEO?				
73. Are the distinct roles and responsibilities of board and CEO understood and respected by all?				
74. Does the board allow and provide the CEO professional growth and development opportunities?				
Change Management				
75. Is leadership open to new ideas that emerge from board members, staff, customers or other stakeholders?				
76. When a major change is underway, does the organization put a written plan in place?				
77. Does the organization take time to celebrate short-term victories associated with long-term change efforts?				
78. Does the organization take steps to embed changes in the organization's culture?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Leadership Development and Training				
79. Is there a regular process in place for veteran board members to mentor newer board members?				
80. Do board members engage in regular opportunities to participate in training and ongoing education?				
81. Does the board regularly review its leadership needs and develop new board members to fill those roles?				
Leadership Transitions and Succession Planning				
82. Is there a written succession plan in place for the CEO?				
83. Are there written succession plans in place for the board's leadership positions?				
84. How can the organization improve in the area of Leadership and Management?				

PLANNING AND EVALUATION

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Strategic Planning				
85. Does the organization have written documents that clearly describe the organization's mission, strategic vision, long-term and short-term goals and action steps?				
86. Did the board take an active role in crafting the strategic plan?				
87. Does the plan outline specific objectives for the board, board officers, and committees as well as staff?				
88. Does the board regularly review the progress on the stated goals, and make adjustments as needed?				
89. Is the board able to use the strategic plan as a tool for assessing the performance of the CEO?				
90. Is the CEO able to use the strategic plan as a tool for assessing the performance of staff?				
Program Planning and Logic Models				
91. Are those responsible for program planning utilizing logic models to assess existing resources and develop desired outcomes and performance measures?				
92. Is program planning based on assessment of needs for people served or the community?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Program Evaluation and Outcome Measurement				
93. Are the organization's measures for successful programs, services and operations clear to everyone?				
94. Does the board review outcomes data and performance measures to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of programs and make changes accordingly?				
95. Does the board have information, in addition to staff reports, by which to evaluate program effectiveness?				
96. How can the organization improve in the area of Planning and Evaluation?				

HUMAN RESOURCES

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Position Descriptions				
97. Are there written job descriptions for the CEO and other staff that clearly spell out their responsibilities?				
98. Do all staff members have access to an up-to-date job description outlining their key responsibilities?				
99. Is there a process in place for regularly reviewing and updating the CEO and staff position descriptions?				
Employment Manual				
100. Has the board adopted an Employment Manual including staff selection, training, promotion, compensation, and grievance procedures?				
101. Do all staff have access to up-to-date copies of the Employment Manual?				
102. Are comprehensive personnel files maintained in a secure, legally-compliant manner?				
103. Has the board defined its philosophy of progressive discipline and other important HR matters?				
Compensation				
104. Does the board regularly review and update the salary and benefits packages of the CEO and employees?				
105. Does the board review contracts and performance of independent contractors employed by the organization?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Performance Evaluation				
106. Does the board provide a written performance evaluation to the CEO at least annually?				
107. Do all staff members receive written performance evaluations by the CEO annually?				
108. Are performance evaluations based on clearly identified expectations spelled out in strategic and program plans, the Employment Manual, and position descriptions?				
109. How can the organization improve in the area of Human Resources?				

VOLUNTEERS

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Policies and Planning				
110. Does the organization have strategies and infrastructure for mission-driven volunteer engagement?				
111. Does the organization have comprehensive policies in place governing volunteers and their activities?				
112. Does the organization have a risk management policy?				
113. Does the organization carry sufficient liability insurance to cover volunteers?				
114. Does the organization's budget contain sufficient resources for developing and supporting volunteers?				
Recruitment and Screening				
115. Does the organization have a strategy for outreach and volunteer recruitment to sustain ongoing volunteer engagement?				
116. Does the organization have a plan for screening, selecting, and matching volunteers?				
117. Does the organization conduct background checks on volunteers who handle money or who are around vulnerable people (children, elderly, disabled, etc.)?				
118. Does the organization have a method to match volunteers to the most appropriate role?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Training and Retention				
119. Has the organization developed a curriculum/ manual for training volunteers on their respective roles?				
120. Has the organization equipped volunteers to work with each other?				
121. Does the organization clarify roles, re-train and support volunteers throughout their service tenure?				
122. Does the organization's leadership demonstrate commitment to volunteer engagement by dedicating sufficient resources (time, money, people, tools)?				
123. Does the organization invite dialogue with volunteers?				
Tracking and Evaluation				
124. Does the organization have a method to track the outputs and outcomes of volunteer contributions?				
125. Does the organization monitor the quality of the volunteer experience?				
126. Is the organization able to articulate volunteer contributions and impact?				
127. How can the organization improve in the area of Volunteers?				

FUNDRAISING

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Board Involvement				
128. Are all board members actively involved in securing adequate financial resources to fund the budget?				
129. Does the board understand and support the organization's income strategies?				
130. Is there a written agreement concerning any expectation that board members contribute financially?				
Fundraising Planning				
131. Does the organization have a written plan for fundraising that outlines roles and responsibilities of board, staff and volunteers?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
132. Does the organization have a written plan in place that outlines which fundraising methods the organization will use (and not use) in a given year, including events, mail, major donor, grant-writing, social media, etc.?				
133. Does the organization have a written plan in place that provides for regular, renewable sources of unrestricted income to support operations?				
134. Does the organization's budget provide sufficient resources for fundraising (printing, mail, events, etc.)?				
Databases and Information Management				
135. Does the organization have a secure contact management system for donors/potential donors?				
136. Do all board members participate in providing updated information for donors/potential donors?				
137. Does the organization know where to find donor and grantmaker information?				
Campaigns and Gift Acceptance				
138. Are board members aware of grants received, any stipulations, restrictions or requirements in the award contract and how the funds are tracked in the financials?				
139. Do board members know how gifts can be received (cash, checks, online, stocks, property, estate plans, etc.)?				
140. Does the organization use technology (website and social media) to ask for and receive donations?				
141. Does the organization regularly solicit donations from board members, staff, volunteers, and members?				
142. How can the organization improve in the area of Fundraising?				

TECHNOLOGY

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Computers and Equipment				
143. Does the organization have the ability to use functioning computers that are basically up to date?				
144. Does the organization have a regular and reliable process for backing up computer records?				
145. Does the organization have reliable access to the internet?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
Record Keeping				
146. Does the organization use computer software (Excel, QuickBooks) to keep financial records?				
147. Does the organization have software to record the types of services provided to individuals/families?				
148. Does the organization have software to record individuals or families enrolled/served through programs as well as client outcomes?				
149. Does the organization have software capable of keeping track of donors, members and volunteers?				
150. Is the organization's electronic records, including email, addressed in a Document Retention and Destruction Policy?				
Specific Tools				
151. Does the organization make use of Web 2.0 tools such as Google Drive and Trello for sharing documents internally?				
152. How can the organization improve in the area of Technology?				

MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public Relations				
153. Do board members positively represent the organization in the community?				
154. Does the organization publish an annual report?				
155. Does the board regularly review the organization's marketing and PR position and strategy and make adjustments as needed?				
Branding and Storytelling				
156. Has the organization discussed branding and ways to implement your brand across media platforms?				
157. Is the organization adept at telling its story?				

	Yes	No	?	Comments
158. Does the organization make use of a unique logo and other visual elements on all printed and online materials?				
159. Does the organization have clear text (consistent message) that is used on all printed and online materials?				
160. Does the organization have a simple tagline that tells all who see or hear it exactly what your group does?				
161. Does the organization have pictures or simple informational graphics that tell the story of what you do?				
Website and Social Media				
162. Is there an easy-to-use "Donate" button clearly visible on every page of your website?				
163. Is the organization using multiple forms of social media?				
164. Is the organization using social media consistently according to a set editorial calendar for posting?				
165. Does the organization have a policy on use of social media that outlines who may post on behalf of the organization?				
166. How can the organization improve in the area of Branding and Media?				