



## Introduction

When people come together and decide to form an organisation or an association and develop statutes, they are required to create a board that will follow the statutes and make sure the organisation is following its goals. A strong organisational structure is very important to make sure the organisation follows its mission and is successful with its goals. Often, board members serve on the board because of their passion and commitment to a cause. They steer the organisation towards a good future by following good governance and financial management policies, as well as find resources to advance its mission. They also need to take an active approach to oversee the organization and to prevent problems and legal issues.

At General Assembly, your members select the board. Candidates should be nominated freely, and members should not be forced to vote.

## Different Types of Boards

There are several different types of boards:

- Working board
- Governing board
- Advisory board

**Working boards** are most common in small organizations or community groups that do not have the funds to hire paid staff. The individual members of the working board implement the activities because they do not have staffs. A small association may not survive without board members being actively involved. For instance, when you start an association, you need a working board. A working board often focuses on project management and does direct work in the community rather than the governing needs. If an organisation can hire employees, then the responsibilities will be divided for the board and for the staff members.

A **governing board** manages the affairs of an organisation to make sure that they are heading into the right direction and following policies. A governing body is the group of people given the power and authority to form the policy and steer the overall direction of an organisation. It is the collective unit that makes and implements decisions on behalf of its members and the organisation.

Working boards exist alongside of governing boards, and it is important to understand the differences between these two major types. There is a lot of overlap between these two types of boards. A difference between a working board and a governing board is that the members of a working board do the work of the organisation and implement the activities, whereas members of a governing board do not. Rather than doing administrative work, board members of a governing board oversee and guide these activities.



An advisory board is a body that provides strategic advice to the management of an organization or a foundation. The main reason to create an advisory board is to seek expertise outside of the organisation. An advisory board is often used to share information, ideas, and advice to the organisation. They typically do not have the authority to make final decisions.

## Functions of a Board

The expectations of what a board will do depends on the type of organisation and board and if there are any staff members that are able to do the daily work of operating the organisation. The board should be separated from the staff. Governance in an organisation may include doing activities that follow the vision, mission, and goals of the organisation. Those activities are for example improving the lives of their members, ensuring that they are following the statutes of the organisation and finding ways to expand the organisation's work and future expansion. Management tends to include daily activities such as bookkeeping, maintaining programs and services, financial needs and more. This tends to be done by the staff members if the organisation can hire them.

The board may be expected to do the following:

### Monitoring

- Following mission and vision of the organisation
- Direction for the organisation
- Internal management
- Financial management

### Action

- Complete annual plans and reports
- Have organisational policies and procedures in place
- Programs and services for its members and community
- Fundraising and finding resources to keep the organisation going
- Court or appeal if members need assistance

### Representation

- Members' interests and needs with the government, disability community and general society
- Good community relations
- Partnerships with other organisations and businesses
- Offer consultancy to those that want to work with the community and improve services



## Roles and Responsibilities

- Board members are responsible for overseeing the organisation's activities.
- They meet regularly to discuss and vote on the affairs of the organization.
- Most organisations require an annual meeting with all board members present.
- Additional meetings are likely to take place throughout the year so board members can discuss and make other necessary decisions.
- Board memberships are not set up to be in permanent positions; most organizations have set up terms for board members, which are usually between two and five years.
- Officers of a board have more responsibilities and are voted by their members.
- Most of the organisations have roles of President, Secretary, and Treasurer.
- Officer roles and their terms should be specifically defined in the organisation's statutes.
- It is a good idea to establish a system to complain about the board, if they do not fulfil their roles and responsibilities.
- One of the most important responsibilities for many boards is to hire a talented executive director and other staff to run the day-to-day management activities of the organization.

General duties for board officers are:

### President

- The President supervises the affairs of the board/organisation
- Must be elected by the association members at the General Assembly
- Represents the organisation on official occasions, unless otherwise decided
- Calls the meetings and prepares the agenda of the meeting in cooperation with the secretary

### Vice President

- Temporarily takes over the office and duties of the President in their absence or incapacity
- Takes office of the President if they leave position
- When the Vice President is acting in place of President, he/she has all the duties and responsibilities of the office

### Secretary

National and international correspondence  
Providing information about the organisation  
Filing of all the documents  
Keeping minutes and records of all the organisation meetings  
May have an Assistant Secretary



## Treasurer

- Preparation of the annual budget
- Preparation of the financial reports
- Responsibility for money transactions
- Preparing the accounts
- Fundraising
- May have a financial secretary instead of a Treasurer
- May have an Assistant Treasurer

## What makes a good board?

It is best practice to find individuals within the community who have passions and experience that aligns with the organisation's mission. Often, new or small organisations have board members serving in management positions where the goal is that board members are separate from paid staff members. The board of directors, as a governing body, should focus on the organization's mission, strategy and goals. Staff members are responsible for the implementation of the mission. Board meetings should be organised regularly. There should be open discussion on the topics on the agenda. Decisions should be done as decided in the constitution.

You should consider to what extent is your board inclusive. You should be actively promoting gender equality and diversity. You should be aware of the level of the participation of board members from the underrepresented female board members. How can you ensure their participation? Are all board members active in discussion and participation?

It is important to create a board with a lot of skills diversity. For example, if you have a person who is ready and able to create and plan new activities and another individual who is experienced in fundraising, you may want to look for additional board members who are experienced with accounting, volunteer scheduling, or other necessary skills. Skills are not the only place where a working board needs diversity. You may also want to consider the personalities of each of your members. Try to keep an eye out for members with personality traits that will complement each other. For example, someone who is super excited and full of ideas can be a huge asset during brainstorming sessions. That said, you also need a board member who tends to plan ahead and is detail oriented. Those traits complement each other.

In your organisation, try to include:

**Different personalities** with different skills, talents, experiences, interests and social background that can benefit the association.

**Member involvement** and show interest in the work of the board.

**Respect** for each other and their ideas.

**Listening** to others and accepting different viewpoints.



**Knowledgeable** members must be well informed of the work of the organisation, its objectives and the problems it is going through.

**Structure** where individuals and committees assume a proper, active role in their work.

**Sense of priority** instead of wasting time with personal problems.

**Strength** to make important decisions and stand by the decision no matter how painful the action may be.

**Financial support** needs to be received with the help of board members. The board should be filled with people who have positive qualities of leadership, diplomacy and have a clear vision of where the organisation should go. They should be a team player and able to include everyone in the organisation – the board, staff and members.

### **Hearing Allies**

It is considered best practices and encouraged for deaf organisations to have board members who are deaf or hard of hearing. Some organisations have board members who are hearing and hold the position of Vice President or Secretary, who work as interpreters and others who help with management. They are considered as hearing allies and can be very important and helpful for the organisation as part of committee or project work, staff member or as partners (e.g. interpreting association). There are many ways they can support the deaf organisation without becoming a board member.