



# What Goes Into a **BOARD 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 secure board portal. 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, 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.)

- ▶ **The Board**
  - Board member names and contact information
  - Board member biographical summaries, written in a standard format, with photos
  - Board member terms
  - Statement of board responsibilities
  - Board member responsibilities
  - Committee descriptions and membership
- ▶ **Historical references for the organization**
  - Brief written history and/or fact sheet
  - Articles of Incorporation
  - IRS determination letter
- ▶ **Bylaws**
- ▶ **Strategic framework or plan**
  - Mission, vision, and values statements
  - Current strategic framework or plan
  - List and descriptions of key programs
- ▶ **Finance**
  - Prior year's annual report
  - Prior year's audit report
  - Outlines of financial growth (for example, sales, membership, and programs over 5 to 10 years)
  - Current annual budget and projections, as appropriate
  - IRS Form 990
  - Banking resolutions
  - Financial policies (for example, investments, reserves, and endowments)
  - Risk management policies

### ▶ **Board policies**

- Accreditation documents (if applicable)
- Anti-harassment
- Conflict of interest
- Confidentiality
- Document retention and destruction
- Insurance coverage
- Legal liability
- Reserves
- Social media
- Travel and meeting expense reimbursements
- Whistleblower
- Others that apply to your board

### ▶ **Staff**

- The chief executive's job description
- Staff list, including at least senior staff and those with whom the board might interact
- Organization chart

### ▶ **Resource development**

- Board fundraising goal for the current year
- Case statement
- Current funder list
- Sample grant proposal
- Sponsorship policy
- Planned giving program

### ▶ **Other information**

- Annual board calendar
- Minutes from the last three board meetings
- List of common acronyms and terms (with explanations)
- Current brochures
- Website and social media information