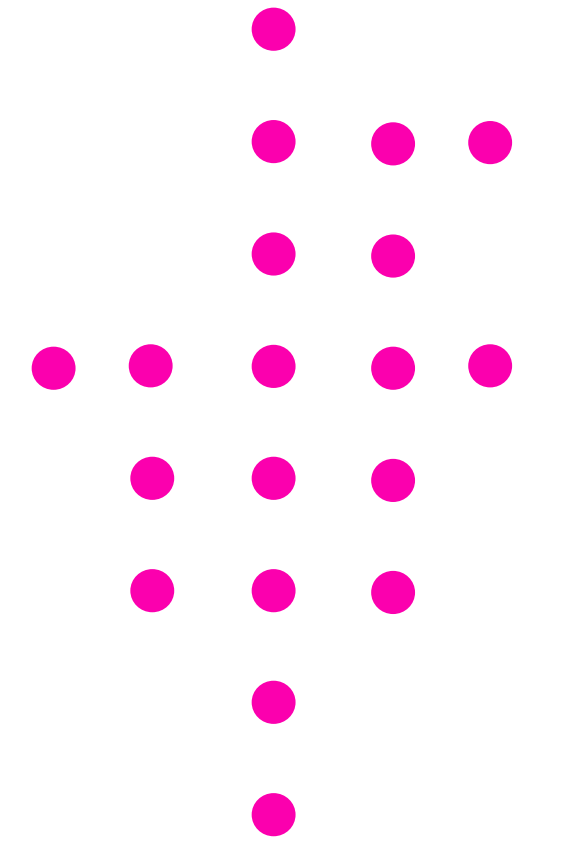




The Complete Guide to Nonprofit Board Roles and Responsibilities



Nonprofit boards play a crucial role in guiding and overseeing an organization's operations while ensuring it remains true to its mission. Board members lead this critical work.

Becoming a nonprofit board member, either in a leadership position or as a board member at large, requires a commitment to the organization and a dedication of your time and talent.

Download our full eBook to learn about nonprofit roles and responsibilities and how to better prepare for a board member position.

What is a Nonprofit Board of Directors?

A nonprofit board of directors is a group of individuals responsible for overseeing the governance of a nonprofit organization. These individuals are typically volunteers who serve without compensation and are chosen for their expertise and experience.

The nonprofit board of directors has several crucial roles, including governance, fiduciary responsibility, oversight, fundraising, and advocacy. Read on for a more in-depth explanation of the responsibilities and roles of nonprofit board members.

Nonprofit Board Roles and Responsibilities

The most effective nonprofit board of directors is comprised of board members whose skills, expertise, and education align with the specific needs and goals of the organization. Successful board members possess the following characteristics:

- Commitment to the mission
- Expertise and experience
- Leadership skills
- Ethical integrity
- Financial literacy
- Strong communication

There are several key positions within a nonprofit board of directors. Common board member positions include:

- Executive director
- Chair
- Vice chair
- Secretary
- Ethical integrity
- Financial literacy
- Strong communication





Create a balanced, well-rounded board by recruiting people with diverse skills, backgrounds, and identities. This leads to more creative and effective decision-making, as well as a broader understanding of the community the organization serves.

As a collective unit, the board is responsible for nonprofit board governance, which includes:

- Setting the organization's mission, vision, and strategic direction
- Establishing policies and procedures to guide the organization's operations
- Ensuring the organization operates in accordance with its mission and values
- Maintaining legal and regulatory compliance
- Representing the organization to stakeholders, including the public, funders, and other organizations

Let's examine how each board member contributes to these responsibilities.



Executive Director

Within most nonprofit governance models, an executive director role is the highest position. They manage the organization's daily activities and direct the nonprofit to achieve its mission and vision.

Nonprofit executive director responsibilities include:

- **Leadership:** Oversees the directors of each department and represents their interests when reporting to the board.
- **Programming and board development:** Collaborates with the board to plan, create, and implement programs to achieve organizational and professional development goals.
- **Financial oversight:** Analyzes financial documents and annual budget to position the entity for financial success.
- **Compliance reporting:** Ensures the organization complies with industry regulations, fiduciary duties, and tax requirements.
- **Technology implementation:** Helps the organization implement and adopt technology solutions that maximize productivity and streamline processes.

To improve effectiveness in an executive director role or gain experience to earn the title, individuals should:

1. **Embrace technology:** Utilize board management software to streamline communication, document sharing, and meeting management.
2. **Build connections:** Network with board members, staff, volunteers, donors, and other industry experts.
3. **Strategize:** Set clear goals, priorities, and action plans for the organization.



Chairperson

The chairperson, sometimes called an executive chair, acts as a bridge between the board of directors and the CEO, ensuring effective communication and alignment. This role is often held by someone who has previously served as the company's CEO or demonstrates a track record of industry success.

Chairperson responsibilities include:

- **Board oversight:** Presides over the board of directors, facilitating board meetings and ensuring board decisions align with the company's mission.
- **Leadership and governance:** Sets the organization's strategic direction and oversees its implementation.
- **Partnership cultivation:** Actively cultivates external partnerships that benefit the organization.
- **Mentorship:** Supports the professional development of the leadership team and board.
- **Crisis management:** Works closely with management to devise and implement crisis management strategies.

To improve effectiveness in a chairperson role or gain experience to earn the title, individuals should:

1. **Focus on professional development:** Attend workshops, seminars, and conferences focused on leadership development, governance best practices, and nonprofit management.
2. **Develop strong communication skills:** Focus on active listening, clear articulation of ideas, and the ability to convey complex information in a concise manner.
3. **Build relationships:** Network with key stakeholders, industry leaders, and other organizations.



Vice Chair

Because the chairperson's role is so important, boards appoint a vice chair to assist the chair and take over in their absence. The vice chair steps in as an objective listener and mediator if anyone on the board has conflicts with the chair. They also may serve as the chair's successor.

Vice chair responsibilities include:

- **Backup support:** Splits the chair's workload and takes over as board leader in their absence.
- **Conflict resolution:** Mediates and helps bridge gaps between the chair and leadership or the board.
- **Strategic planning:** Collaborates with the chair and CEO on setting the organization's short- and long-term goals.
- **Committee support:** Serves as an ex officio member on all board committees.
- **Board governance:** Ensures the board operates effectively, adheres to bylaws, and fulfills responsibilities.

To improve effectiveness in a chairperson role or gain experience to earn the title, individuals should:

1. **Develop leadership skills:** Take courses, attend workshops, or seek mentorship to enhance leadership skills.
2. **Seek feedback:** Regularly seek feedback from the chairperson, board members, and others to identify areas for improvement.
3. **Build relationships:** Develop strong relationships with other board members, the chairperson, CEO, and key stakeholders.



Secretary

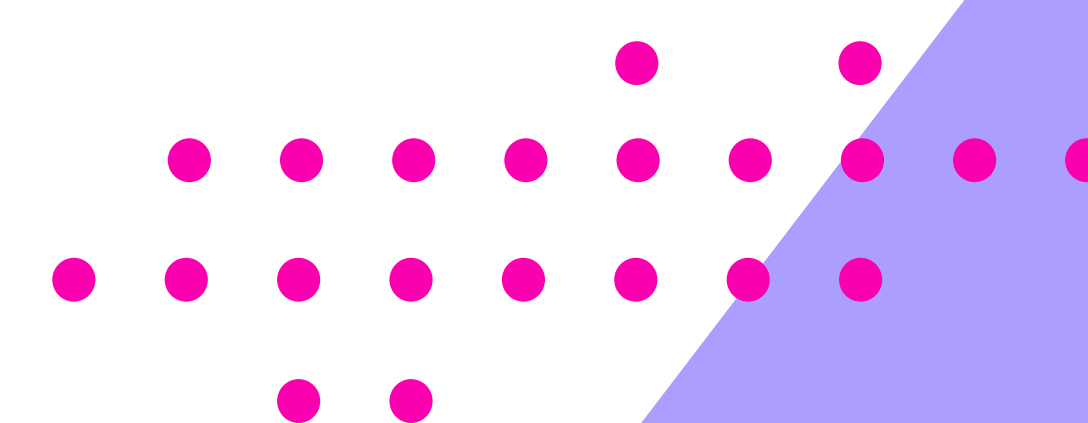
The nonprofit board secretary keeps the board engaged, on task, and accountable. They maintain the board's records and calendar, ensuring compliance, on-time filings, efficiency, and organization.

Nonprofit board secretary responsibilities include:

- **Recordkeeping:** Records and distributes all board and committee meeting minutes, coordinates their approval, and ensures their accuracy.
- **Meeting planning:** Coordinates board of director, committee, and shareholder meetings.
- **Compliance reporting:** Manages federal and state compliance reporting and governance requirements.
- **Membership tracking:** Tracks board member terms, ensuring new members are in the pipeline before existing members reach term limits.
- **Corporate advising:** Serves as the resident expert, advising executives and directors on corporate governance best practices and compliance issues.

To improve effectiveness as a secretary or gain experience to earn the title, individuals should:

1. **Utilize technology:** Find and implement a board portal platform that promotes secure document storage, streamlines minutes and agenda creation, and enhances board communication.
2. **Be proactive:** Proactively seek out resources and solutions to help the board operate more effectively.
3. **Communicate effectively:** Maintain open communication with board members, ensuring everyone is informed of meeting dates, agendas, and important deadlines.





Treasurer

A nonprofit treasurer manages the financial health of an organization. This involves aligning the organization's mission with the operational budget and planning for the organization's financial future.

Nonprofit treasurer responsibilities include:

- **Cash management:** Oversees the organization's cash flow, ensuring responsible fund management and enough liquidity to meet operational needs.
- **Financial reporting:** Prepares and generates timely, accurate financial reports at the end of each fiscal period.
- **Budgeting:** Coordinates with the executive director, board members, and program heads to create an overall operating budget, as well as budgets for specific programs.
- **Strategic planning:** Counsels the board on how investment decisions, tax obligations, legal requirements, and existing financial developments affect the organization's financial future.
- **Audit oversight:** Coordinates with external auditors to ensure financial audits are conducted in a timely and thorough manner.

To improve effectiveness as a treasurer or gain experience to earn the title, individuals should:

1. **Sharpen skills:** Attend workshops, seminars, or courses to enhance financial knowledge.
2. **Advocate and fundraise:** Promote the organization at community events and participate in fundraising activities.
3. **Utilize technology:** Embrace financial software to improve the organization's efficiency and compliance.



Committee Chair

Nonprofit boards often create committees to advise on specialized areas, such as audits, fundraising, or compensation. Each committee elects or appoints a committee chair to serve as the leader.

No matter the committee, chair responsibilities include:

- **Meeting coordination:** Plans committee meetings, creates agendas, and records minutes.
- **Record keeping:** Organizes secure document storage for committee records.
- **Delegating:** Delegates tasks to committee members and ensures timely completion.
- **Communication:** Acts as a liaison between the committee and the board of directors, providing regular updates on committee activities.
- **Resource management:** Manages the committee's budget and resources, ensuring funds are used efficiently and effectively.

To improve effectiveness as a committee chair or gain experience to earn the title, individuals should:

1. **Join committees:** Sit on other committees to learn more about the organization and how committees conduct business.
2. **Leverage technology:** Plan, run, and facilitate committee meetings efficiently with a board meeting technology solution like [OnBoard](#).
3. **Network:** Develop strong relationships with committee members, board members, and other stakeholders.

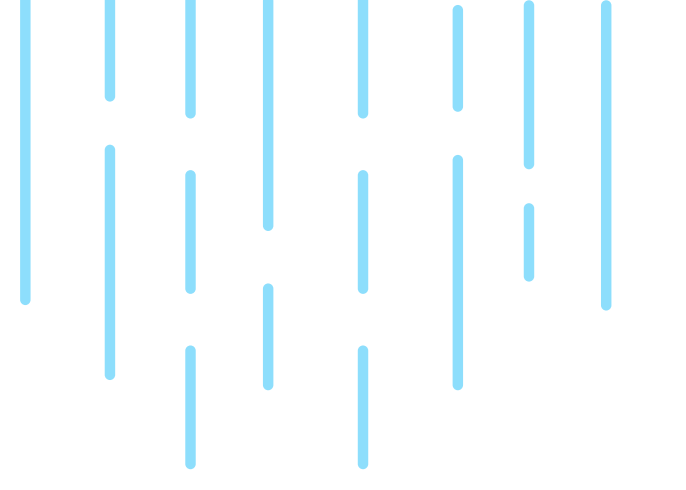


At-Large Board Member

A board member at-large is a voting board member who doesn't hold a defined position. Board members at-large bring diverse perspectives and additional expertise to the board.

Though a board member at-large has more flexible duties, typical responsibilities include:

- **Governance and policy development:** Participates in the development of governance policies, bylaws, and strategic plans.
- **Decision-making:** Contributes to making informed decisions on expenditures, programmatic initiatives, organizational policies, and other activities brought to a vote.
- **Advocacy and outreach:** Acts as an ambassador, promoting the organization's mission to external stakeholders.
- **Oversight and evaluation:** Evaluates performance of the organization and its leadership.
- **Risk management:** Identifies and assesses risks, and works with the board to develop mitigation strategies.



To improve effectiveness as a board member or gain experience, individuals should:

1. **Be curious:** Stay informed about trends and developments in the nonprofit sector, as well as issues relevant to the organization's mission.
2. **Engage in board activities:** Join committees, actively participate in board discussions, and attend board events.
3. **Preparation:** Read board books and agendas prior to meetings and come prepared with questions or relevant insights to share.



Advisory Board Member

Boards sometimes create an advisory board to help fill knowledge gaps, offer outside perspective, or guide specific projects. More like consultants, advisory board members offer counsel to the board, but don't have fiduciary responsibility or voting rights.

While it's not required to have an advisory board, this outside expertise offers many benefits, especially to startups or scrappy nonprofits.

An advisory board member's responsibilities are tailored to the organization's needs, but often include:

- **Support:** Works to support the organization's goals as advisors and to external parties.
- **Guidance:** Offers strategic advice to the organization's leadership.
- **Mentorship:** Shares knowledge, skills, and experiences to help develop talent within the organization.
- **Relationship-building:** Introduces board members to influential community members within their network.
- **Advocacy:** Advocates for the organization's mission and work in their professional and personal networks.

To improve effectiveness as an advisory board member or gain experience to become one, individuals should:

1. **Cultivate a strong network:** Cultivate relationships with professionals in their field and other industries.
2. **Build expertise:** Become an industry expert by taking advantage of educational opportunities and staying current on industry trends.
3. **Gain hands-on experience:** Volunteer for nonprofit organizations in various capacities to learn the ins and outs.



How OnBoard Supports Nonprofit Boards

Each board member proves foundational to a nonprofit's success, and collectively they help the organization operate efficiently and effectively. To encourage collaboration between board members and committees, many nonprofit boards utilize a software solution that streamlines board business and promotes communication.

OnBoard, a purpose-built platform for nonprofit governance and board management, addresses real-world needs and reduces complexity so boards and leadership teams can work smarter, move faster, and achieve more for the organizations they govern.

In addition to providing powerful features like an agenda builder, board assessments, and diversity reporting, OnBoard offers special nonprofit pricing, allowing small teams to accomplish big things.

[Request a demo](#) to see why over 5,000 organizations across the world power their operations with OnBoard.