

"What does a fully engaged board or board look like for your organization?"

Every member can and does speak passionately about why the organization exists, and what steps it is taking to achieve its the change it wants for its community. They can recite the vision and mission statements with heart, and explain them since they created them. They model the values.

Most board time is spent on how to change the community for the better - including changes in what the community wants and innovative ways of addressing those changes. The board sets its own agenda, and every meeting includes both a discussion of a substantive issue for which no strategy has been developed, AND a director education session where directors learn more about the sector, community and organization so they can make better decisions in future. Board members are known in the community and to the staff and spend time listening, demonstrating that they have heard, and promoting the organization. The board chooses to hold some meetings at locations outside the office, including places where its clients or beneficiaries are. Board members promote and support collaboration to leverage the efforts of the organization.

The board has proactively determined what information it needs for oversight and monitoring, and organized it so that very little group time needs to be spent on this. Members read the material thoroughly in advance and come with carefully chosen questions at a strategic level. The board has arranged to receive the appropriate decision support and holds good decision-making discussions that consider issues from viewpoints such as values, strategies, outcomes, success measures and risk assessment.

The board has a respectful, professional relationship with senior staff. It neither micro-manages nor rubber-stamps. It provides frequent meaningful feedback, seeks to compensate fairly and understand the importance of a positive workplace. Board members have a collegial relationship with each other and enjoy socializing outside board meetings; they look forward to the annual retreat. The chair encourages challenging questions and thoughtful dialogue but keeps meetings on agenda and on time unless the group agrees to spend more time on an important issue. Humour and story-telling are welcome if brief. Conflicts and behaviours not in accordance with organizational values are not tolerated, and the chair deals promptly with performance issues of directors and board committees.

Finally, the board is serious about ensuring financial and human resources to achieve its plans. Individual board members use their skills and contacts, and approve investments needed to develop and sustain the organization's capacity to generate revenues.

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