

Reviewing Governance in Your Organization

By Jane Garthson

How do you know if your organization's governance is good enough? If you haven't reviewed it in the last few years, you do not know. More and more organizations are conducting governance reviews about every five years. External pressures and significantly revised strategic plans might spur a review sooner. Organizations generally find such reviews worthwhile even if they decide against major change. The discussions about why you lead as you do will still be worthwhile and you are certain to find some change, however small, that really makes a difference.

In some jurisdictions, governments have passed or introduced new laws governing community benefit organizations, and those new laws require an overhaul of bylaws. No sensible leadership group would significantly rewrite their bylaws before reviewing governance.

Warning Signs

It might be time to review your governance if:

- ◆ Feedback from community and staff indicates a growing dissatisfaction with the board's decisions and/or composition.
- ◆ The bylaws no longer reflect how your organization operates, but there is no consensus on whether to fix the bylaws or bring operations into line with the bylaws.
- ◆ Board members have ongoing conflicts of interest.
- ◆ You see checklists of good nonprofit governance practices but can say yes to fewer than half the items.

