

Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

AN ORIENTATION FOR NEW NONPROFIT BOARD MEMBERS

By Barry VanderKelen

Many **nonprofit** organizations began a new fiscal year July 1 -- and inducted new members to their boards of directors at the same time. Unfortunately, few **nonprofits** do an adequate job orienting new board members. Here are some suggestions that incoming board members may find helpful.

* Remember that the board of directors is responsible for the organization they oversee; they've been recruited for several reasons, usually because of special experience and expertise. Board members should ask pertinent questions about a **nonprofit's** strategic direction, and they should expect answers. However, they should let the staff handle the organization's daily operations. As Dave Edwards, an organization consultant, is fond of saying, "Put your noses in and keep your hands out."

* Boards are responsible for fundraising, in partnership with staff. Too often boards cobble together

enough money to hire a fundraising staff member and think that will solve all of their financial worries. It doesn't. The buck starts and stops with the board of directors. If it isn't passionate about the organization, why should potential donors care?

* Because of board members' responsibilities, make sure the organization has Directors & Officers insurance coverage. Board members should be protected in the event of legal action against the organization.

* Board members have the critical task of hiring and retaining an organization's chief executive officer. Recent studies have shown that it is taking longer to hire these staff members and it's becoming harder to retain them. One reason is the high stress of the job combined with the comparatively low pay of **nonprofit** jobs. Board members should check that the organization's aspirations do not exceed its capability. In order to retain staff members, make the effort to encourage them. An occasional thank-you is always well received. Try to find low-cost ways to help

staff find balance in their lives, such as flexible work schedules or a budget allocation for skill development workshops.

* Like staff members, it is equally difficult to recruit people willing to serve on a board. Many people will fill a place on a roster, but not as many will roll up their sleeves and do the work required of board members. Always keep an eye out for potential new board members who will actively share the workload. Serving on a board of directors for a **nonprofit** is serious and at times difficult work, yet the rewards are many. It is deeply satisfying to help improve the lives of the organization's clients and to develop lasting friendships with other board members.

Being on the board of a **nonprofit** is wonderful service to the community. The efforts of these individuals enhance the quality of life in San Luis Obispo County. Board members deserve our thanks.

Barry VanderKelen is the executive director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation.

Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other week in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community. Each column is reprinted here as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@slocf.org.