

Volume 6, Issue 16

Originally Published
August 25, 2011

Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Tips for a high-performing board

By Barry VanderKelen

Every nonprofit must have a board of directors, but not every director knows what it means to be an effective board member.

Too few organizations provide a proper orientation and new members are left to wonder what they are supposed to be doing.

What does a highperforming board look like? The following notes are from a presentation by La Piana Consulting, a nonprofit based in Emeryville.

High-performing boards:

- know why the organization exists;
- agree on what the board is supposed to do;
- have the tools to do it; and
- have a productive relationship with the executive staff.

Individual members keep the mission top of mind, care passionately about succeeding, initiate and follow through, support the staff and hold the staff leader accountable.

Everyone in the organization must agree on what the organization is about. This idea sounds obvious, but imagine an arts nonprofit that offers programs in schools. Is it focused on arts or on education? Those are two different focuses.

One main task of every board is to create a strategic plan that clarifies purpose and direction. In turn, the executive director is responsible for creating an organizational structure that can implement the strategic plan. The board must secure the resources the plan requires. At the same time, though, it is unacceptable for the staff to

leave fundraising to the board and vice versa. Board and staff must work together on fundraising.

Just as the board supports the staff, the staff must support the board. The executive director must inform board members about what's occurring in the organization, motivate them in their efforts and partner on accomplishing the goals of the organization.

If board members don't do what they're supposed to, everyone will look for scapegoats. It will take years for the organization to recover from the infighting.

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Resource Use

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

Nonprofit Business Column of *The Tribune*

Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes a bi-weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community. See www.slocf.org.

The Tribune publishes the column every other week in the Business section.

Each column is reprinted 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.