

LIFE STAGES OF NONPROFIT BOARDS

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ORGANIZING BOARD

Leading

Circle of leaders with shared vision

or

Following

One leader gathers supportive group

Characteristics:

- ♦ small
- ♦ homogeneous
- ♦ informal
- ♦ committed
- ♦ involved in everything
- ♦ find it difficult to hire/trust first staff members and share power
- ♦ founders think they know best

Original structure is strained by:

- ♦ Growth
- ♦ Overwhelming tasks
- ♦ Burnout
- ♦ Crisis (financial or organizational)
- ♦ Division on key issue

Transition

- ♦ in face of new demands, board and staff must redefine roles, open organization to new people
- ♦ some founding members leave
- ♦ roles are renegotiated
- ♦ development of systems, clearer job descriptions
- ♦ shift to more "business-like" operation

GOVERNING BOARD

Characteristics:

- ♦ board accepts responsibility for "traditional" board tasks
- ♦ board is enlarged, diversified
- ♦ committee structure allows some tasks to be delegated
- ♦ staff may gain new responsibilities and decision-making power

Transition

- ♦ established organization becomes increasingly "professionalized"
- ♦ fundraising function of Board increasingly important

INSTITUTIONAL BOARD

Characteristics:

- ♦ focus on recruiting a large board which includes wealthy and influential people
- ♦ serving on the Board is considered prestigious
- ♦ board oversight responsibilities delegated to committees, including a strong executive committee
- ♦ planning and budgeting often done by staff, reviewed and approved by Board

Source: Board Passages: Three Key Stages in a Nonprofit Board's Life Cycle, by Karl Mathiasen, III, available from the National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1-800-883-6262.