

IDENTIFYING YOUR DECISION MAKERS AND LEADERS AND THEIR DUTIES

Directors are the pilots of the ship. They may have officers, committees and staff working under them, but they are the ultimate leaders of the organization and are responsible for making sure the organization does not stray into treacherous waters.

By law, the organization needs a minimum number of directors. However, most organizations decide they want – or need – more directors involved than the minimum legal requirement. The benefits of additional directors include diversity of experience and viewpoints, and therefore an opportunity for better informed decisions. The detriments of additional directors include perhaps greater complexity and the need for more process. However, if the procedures are well thought out and the directors are motivated and understand their duties, an organization can accomplish much more than it could with just a few directors.

Directors should have a clear understanding of their duties, and this should be in writing. At a minimum, they will need to review materials before meetings and consistently show up for, and meaningfully participate in, the board meetings. In addition, they will need to make their decisions consistent with the nonprofit's charitable purpose. However, successful organizations usually identify other, more detailed, expectations for their directors, ranging from the yearly financial contributions a director is expected to "give or get," to the number of hours a director is expected to spend each month either attending board meetings, committee meetings, or other related activities.

Directors' duties shift depending on the size of the organization. In volunteer organizations, directors will be responsible not only for establishing policies but also for carrying out much of the work, although they may delegate some of that work to officers (usually president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer) or to standing or *ad hoc* committees. However, if the organization has paid staff, such as an executive director or program director, then the directors' tasks change to reflect the difference in responsibilities – the directors (and the officers and committees) become policy makers to a larger degree and the staff become the managers and implementers of the policies.