

# Shaping a more strategic board: 3 steps to big-picture thinking

Donors and funders alike want to see informed, active boards at the helm of the nonprofits they govern. So the pressure's on boards these days to perform at a higher level.

That doesn't necessarily mean board members need to work harder, just smarter.

Part of this involves adopting strategic thinking as a mindset to help the board guide the organization into the future.

Here are two ways boards think and act strategically:

## Recruiting strategic thinkers

Boards want to recruit people who have a history of supporting the organization and will work well with others. To create a strategic-thinking board, add these to the list of desirable qualities:

- **curiosity.** The best members must be willing to ask questions and never take a statement at face value.
- **ability to think ahead.** New members should be able to envision outcomes that will follow from

specific actions.

- **ability to brainstorm options.** Board members who think creatively are an asset to any organization.

How to find these people?

One approach: Board members should look at everyone they meet as a potential board member.

They can share names at

meetings, then make sure to cultivate the most likely prospects with invitations to events or to join a committee, etc.

## Getting informed

Board members need to have certain skills and knowledge to be able to make

*(please see Shaping ... p. 2)*

## STRATEGIC THINKING

### Shaping ...

*(continued from p. 1)*

well-informed decisions. Some may need training in how to read financial statements.

Board members also need the background to understand the dashboard – the set of indicators many groups share at every meeting. It provides an instant picture of the nonprofit's health.

#### Keep big picture in focus

Board members who are focused on the big picture:

1. **Read reports before the meeting.** That leaves time to discuss action items.
2. **Build education into every meeting.** That could mean a visit with a client, a briefing by program staff or

fundraising training. The exposure can be energizing.

3. **Save time for the big stuff.** One nonprofit pro suggests limiting each board meeting agenda to a single weighty issue that needs the board's strategic input.

Finally, strategic-thinking boards need to share a common vision, values and goals.

That may mean they'll have to spend time meshing their views. But it's worth the effort. Thrashing out these issues will help ensure they're able to make decisions strategically.

*Source: Terrie Temkin, [www.charitychannel.com](http://www.charitychannel.com) and [TerrieTemkin@CoreStrategies4Nonprofits.com](mailto:TerrieTemkin@CoreStrategies4Nonprofits.com)*