

# How to Increase Board Member Engagement

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8 min read



In the for-profit world, business owners continuously talk about the importance of employee engagement. Engagement directly correlates with productivity and profits.

## Key Takeaways

- **Why Engagement Is Important for a Nonprofit Board of Directors:** Having an engaged board is not just important; it's vital. The success and positive impact of your nonprofit's mission depend on your board members' engagement...
- **Hold Effective Meetings:** If ineffective or disorganized meetings make it seem like you do not properly value the time your board members give, they can quickly become disengaged with the organization, their position on the board, and the mission...
- **Avoiding the Bored Board and With Boosted Nonprofit Board Engagement:** When you take steps to actively engage each of your nonprofit's board members, you'll be able to tap into their individual talents and strengths...

In the nonprofit world, you might not be concerned with profits, but you should be concerned with productivity, effectiveness, efficiency, and your ability to generate impact through your mission.

A nonprofit board is effectively the engine behind your nonprofit's operations and the ultimate success or failure of the mission. Nonprofit board seats, however, are typically filled by unpaid volunteers whose ongoing engagement with the organization and their roles within it is essential to success.

## Why Engagement Is Important for a Nonprofit Board of Directors

Having an engaged board is not just important; it's vital. The success and positive impact of your nonprofit's mission depend on your board members' engagement (i.e. interest, motivation, and effectiveness). Without an engaged board, a nonprofit can't function properly. Work doesn't get completed, projects become stagnate, budgets can be spent inefficiently, opportunities are missed, reputations can be damaged, and donor networks can stop growing.

## Reasons Why Your Nonprofit Board Is Disengaged

Nonprofit board members can become disengaged for countless reasons. Some of the most common include:

- Not understanding their roles and responsibilities.
- Lack of training or direction.
- Becoming frustrated with a lack of progress or slow progress.
- Not being properly recognized and appreciated for their contribution.
- Discord and disagreements among board members or a lack of team building.

## 10 Engagement Strategies for Nonprofit Board Members

### 1. Perfect Your Onboarding Experience

From day one, you should be considering what you can do to engage a new board member. They'll join your organization with fresh enthusiasm, and you should be sure to make the most of the new member's initial motivation and excitement. Properly introduce new members to your organization by introducing them to your mission, ensuring they clearly understand their roles and responsibilities as board members. Provide them with plenty of resources to get acquainted with the organization and to carry out their duties on the board.

Be sure to take the time to welcome new board members properly. Introduce them to the team and the organization's processes and ensure they feel appreciated and valued.

### 2. Hold Effective Meetings

[Nonprofit board members](#) are giving their time freely to your organization. If ineffective or disorganized meetings make it seem like you do not properly value the time your board members give, they can quickly become disengaged with the organization, their position on the board, and the mission.

One of the best ways to show your board members how much you value and appreciate the time they give the organization is to make the most of it during each meeting. Ensure you are properly prepared for meetings, distribute necessary materials and information ahead of your meeting time, and come ready with an efficient agenda.

Meetings are one of the most expensive overhead costs. And the proof is in the numbers. A recent survey observing 19 million meetings across the U.S found that ineffective meetings cost organizations up to \$399 billion. [1]

Use your valuable meeting time, the time when you are all together, to tackle collaborative tasks that can't be managed alone and to have collaborative conversations that can't be effectively carried out over email or phone.

Remember that meetings are the perfect time to delegate tasks or assign "homework" to your board members. You and your board members should never leave meetings without a clear

idea of the work that needs to be done and who is responsible for handling what before the next meeting.

### **3. Keep Communication Open Between Meetings**

A highly effective meeting can reinvigorate your board members, motivating them to go out into the world and drum up support for your cause. It's highly important, however, to maintain communication between meetings; once back in the world and in the swing of normal life, your board members can quickly lose hold of their engagement, lose sight of the mission, and forget about the tasks they were assigned to complete.

**Read More:** [Lead The Pack With Emotional Intelligence](#)

Check-in with each of your board members between meetings to remind them of their responsibilities and how much their work is valued.

### **4. Send Updates Regularly**

As a part of keeping in touch with board members in between meetings, you should send regular (i.e. weekly) updates about project progress. Outline what tasks are complete, what still needs to be accomplished, and what issues your board members should be thinking about to prepare for your next meeting. Ask your board members to routinely keep you updated as well so that you have all of the information to report back to everyone in your own updates.

### **5. Create Committees**

[Committees](#) are a great way to create accountability while fostering collaboration throughout your board. Committees help individuals better understand their roles and responsibilities as board members and also streamline the delegation of tasks, as jobs can be more easily distributed among "themed" committees.

Plus, committees require that board members work together in smaller groups, and this helps to build camaraderie among your board members and accelerates the acclimation process for new members, as well.

## Board Of Directors Vs. Executive Directors Roles. *Who does what?*

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PLAN

Revise the PLAN

Once management finishes the analysis, you'll need to **revise the plan** and submit it to the board for approval.

It's helpful to know who owns what >>

	Board Of Directors	Executive Director
<b>PEOPLE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hire and evaluate executive director</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hire and supervise all staff</li> </ul>
<b>MISSION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Approve mission, vision, values, and strategic plan</li> <li>- Maintain accountability for the organization- including abiding by accounting requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop and execute implementation plan, report milestones to board.</li> <li>- Work with board to develop mission, vision, values, and strategic pan.</li> </ul>
<b>ECONOMICS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work through the finance committee to approve the Budget</li> <li>- Review financial indicators and ensure adjustments are made</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop annual budget.</li> <li>- Report to board on key financial metrics- including cash flow &amp; budget to actual.</li> <li>- Comply with board-approved financial policies and reporting requirements</li> </ul>
<b>PROGRAMS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure programs are meeting objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop and implement programs</li> <li>- Report program effectiveness to the board</li> </ul>

5 Steps to Run Better, Grow Stronger and Raise More Money

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[Download the full guide: 5 Steps To Run Better, Grow Stronger, and Raise More Money for more tips on how to run your organization successfully.](#)

### 6. Use Technology to Streamline Nonprofit Board Management

Modern technology tools have simplified nonprofit board management with tools for virtual scheduling, meetings, centralized communication, collaboration, project management, and file storage and access. Taking advantage of these tools can improve your entire board's effectiveness, help to maintain momentum between meetings, and boost your ability to collaborate.

Read More: [What Nonprofits Can Learn From the Best Well-Run Businesses \(and Vice Versa!\)](#)

## 7. Routinely Evaluate Board Performance

Performance evaluations are a good way to measure and maintain your board's engagement. There are several approaches to performance evaluation, and it can be a good idea to use as many of these as possible on a routine basis to get the most accurate measure.

- **Self Evaluation** - Have each board member consider the work they've done for the organization and what they might be able to do in the future. Additionally, include questions about how well the board member understands their role and responsibilities, if the organization could do anything to improve their effectiveness and engagement, and if they believe there are any roles or responsibilities they might be better suited for in the future.
- **Peer-to-Peer Assessment** - These evaluations are best conducted anonymously, as they ask individual board members to evaluate the performance and participation of their peer board members. This is an excellent opportunity to find out where certain members excel and where improvements could be made.
- **Executive Director Assessment** - As an executive director, you can also routinely complete performance evaluations. In your role, it's best to complete these assessments, looking at the board as a whole entity – rather than doling out individual criticism. Simply issue blanket feedback, and your board members will understand where they're excelling and where they could improve.
- **Third-Party Assessment** - If you believe your board could use some major improvements or if you've found that there's conflict in determining how a board could improve, then a third-party consultant's objective opinion and advice can be invaluable in engaging and improving your board's performance.

## 8. Connect to Your Members' Individual Motivations

You should be familiar with the reasons why each of your board members decided to join the board and serve your [organization](#). Are they passionate about your mission? Did they want to expand their own network? Do they love public speaking? Were they looking for a chance to develop their own personal brand, skills, or career?

If you're not sure why your members were motivated to serve your organization in the first place, find out. If you already know, revisit these motivations. Make sure you're helping to fuel the fire by engaging each member in ways that speak to their initial motivation to serve.

## 9. Always Be Appreciative

You already know how important it is to thank your donors, but do you extend the same level of appreciation to the individuals serving right within your organization? Continuously thanking your board members is vital to keeping them engaged. If a board member does not feel that their time, effort, work, and presence are appreciated by the organization, they will disengage quickly and likely start looking for other organizations where their service will be better appreciated.

## **10. Conduct Thorough Exit Interviews**

When a board member's time on your board comes to an end, you should be conducting a thorough exit interview. At the time when their official relationship with your nonprofit is coming to an end, your board member is most likely to answer questions honestly. So, it's a great opportunity for learning about the board member's experience in your organization and serving on the board. Ask about the experience, what they like or disliked about serving on the board, what they believe could improve, and what they think worked well.

Use the information gained in exit interviews to continuously improve the experience for your new and existing members in the future.

## **Avoiding the Bored Board and With Boosted Nonprofit Board Engagement**

A disengaged board has the power to create a stagnate organization and block the path between you and your nonprofit's mission. However, when you take steps to actively engage each of your nonprofit's board members, you'll be able to tap into their individual talents and strengths, putting them to work for the benefit of your organization and the strengthening of its mission and impact.

[1 ] <https://leadmeetings.com/blog/productive-meetings-roi/>