Board Duties and Responsibilities

Every board member should be familiar with their basic [fiduciary responsibilities](https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/board-roles-and-responsibilities), which include:

* **Duty of Care** **—** Ensuring the nonprofit’s assets are used with prudence and care.
* **Duty of Loyalty** **—** Ensuring the board makes decisions in the nonprofit’s best interest.
* **Duty of Obedience** **—** Ensuring the nonprofit is continually in compliance with its bylaws and all other laws and regulations.

Considering each nonprofit is unique in its own right, board member responsibilities will vary beyond the basics. As an organization grows, the board is responsible for adjusting the duties of board members to the organization’s best interest.

Board Member Responsibilities for Nonprofits

Beyond their fiduciary duties, nonprofit board members have several other board member responsibilities. Your [BoardEffect](https://www.boardeffect.com/board-portal/) board management conveniently stores documents describing board member responsibilities so board members can easily access them.

We’ll give you a sampling of board member responsibilities here.

* **Establish the Organization’s Vision, Mission and Purpose —**The board should be clear on its purpose and base its [vision](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/what-vision-statement-why-important/) and [mission](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/elements-of-a-good-mission-statement/) statements on why the nonprofit exists. The vision is what the board wants to see. The mission is what the nonprofit needs to do to support the vision.
* **Executive Director: Selecting, Supporting and Reviewing —**Boards must identify, recruit and appoint the most qualified individual to serve as the chief executive. In addition, the board writes the chief [executive’s job description](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/what-makes-a-good-executive-director-an-awesome-board/). The board also monitors and supports the executive director.
* **Organizational Planning —**Nonprofit boards are responsible for creating a [strategic plan](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/what-is-a-strategic-planning-committee/) to identify long and short-term goals and working toward achieving them.
* **Monitoring and Managing Financial Resources —**Board directors work together to establish a budget and ensure proper internal controls are in place for incoming and outgoing funds. Nonprofit boards should also establish an audit committee and do an [internal audit](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/audit-committees-role-managing-nonprofit-risk/) every year.
* **Assessing and Developing Skills —**Some board members bring board experience into the boardroom, while others bring unique talents and skills. The board is responsible for doing an annual self-assessment to ensure the entire board has the necessary abilities to lead the nonprofit and is committed to educating board members in their roles.
* **Serving on Committees —**It is considered a best practice for all board members to serve on at least one [committee](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/nonprofit-board-committee-structure/).
* **Recruiting New Board Members —**The purpose of recruiting new board members is to adjust the leadership to meet changing organizational needs. A pipeline of qualified recruits enables the board to choose top talent as they need it.
* **Spreading the Word About the Organization —**Board members serve as ambassadors for the nonprofit. They should engage in outreach to expand the nonprofit’s network of donors and supporters and enhance its public standing.
* **Committing Their Time for Board and Committee Meetings —**Board service requires a time commitment. Board members must be available for all board and [committee meetings](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/nonprofit-board-committee-structure/) and fulfill their duties outside the boardroom at special events, training and community involvement
* **Maintaining Integrity —**Board directors should behave truthfully and ethically and set an example for others. Boards are responsible for establishing basic policies to support the integrity of the nonprofit’s reputation, including a Whistleblower policy, [Code of Conduct](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/code-of-conduct-for-board-members/), and [Code of Ethics](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/5-steps-creating-ethical-organizational-culture/).
* **Ensure Legal Compliance —**Board directors have a fiduciary duty to ensure that their organization complies with its legal obligations. Ensuring legal compliance falls under the Duty of Obedience.

Individual Board Member Roles

While individual members have distinct board member responsibilities, they don’t have any power or authority on their own. A nonprofit board’s influence comes only from the collective board.

Board officers have a limited ability to handle decisions on behalf of the nonprofit. [Officer positions](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/directors-officers-value-questionnaires-insurance/) include the President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Below is a snapshot of the various board roles and their responsibilities:

* **Board President (Officer) —** Presides over board meetings, engages board members, and facilitates conflicts during board meetings. Leads fundraising efforts, welcomes new board members, serves as a public spokesperson for the nonprofit
* **Vice President (Officer)** **—** Fills in for the president as needed, serves as a public spokesperson, often mentors under the Board President, and gives an annual donation.
* **Secretary (Officer) —**Schedules board meetings, prepares agenda and board meeting handbook, takes attendance at board meetings, takes meeting minutes, facilitates their approval, and gives an annual donation.
* **Treasurer (Officer) —**Manages the nonprofit’s budget, records disbursements and receipts, monitors bookkeeping when it is outsourced and gives an annual donation.
* **At-Large Board Members —**Attends all board meetings, serves on at least one committee, arrives at board meetings fully prepared, gives an annual donation, and participates in fundraising.
* **Executive Director —** Manages the nonprofit’s day-to-day operations, hires and monitors staff, and oversees human resources, fundraising, program development, and marketing.

Note that each state has its own rules for how nonprofits must structure their leadership. In some cases, the board president may also serve as the board chair. The president may mentor the vice president with the goal of seceding the president at the next election.

Some nonprofits make it a practice to rotate each member into the board chair position as a means of helping each member get practical experience in running board meetings.

Board Member Responsibilities: Summing It Up

Before a board member accepts a position on a nonprofit board, they should be aware of their fiduciary responsibilities and other essential responsibilities as board members.

A good step during board orientation is to familiarize new board members with the [BoardEffect](https://www.boardeffect.com/board-portal/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) platform, where they can collaborate and communicate with other board members. The platform gives them access to all the documents and tools they need to become a responsible board member.

Moreover, it is never too soon to start mentoring new board members to prepare them to take on additional responsibilities and one day assume an officer position.

The board responsibilities we have outlined here will get boards to serve as a basis for improvement in their boards. Boards may consider using them as a starting point for developing their own, customized expectations and job descriptions for board directors.