

THE DYNAMIC DUO

The Board Chair/Executive Relationship

Let's face it: the relationship between a nonprofit's executive and the board is not easy. The board supervises the executive director, yet the executive knows more about the workings of the organization, has subject expertise, and is often called upon to educate and lead the board to fulfill their responsibilities. Board directors are supposed to function at a high level, setting an organization's strategic framework, but most are busy with business and family obligations and have limited time available.

A strong partnership between the executive director and the board president—based on trust, communication, and respect—not only helps the board and staff to understand each other's needs and work more efficiently, but also sets the tone for interactions throughout the organization. Both leaders work toward fulfilling a common mission, with the board president focused on the future and the executive director focused on daily organizational management and implementing programs. One of the most effective organization-building investments the executive and board chair can make is in their own relationship.¹ Following are a few characteristics of effective board president/executive partnerships.

REGULAR COMMUNICATION

The two leaders agree on what information must be shared, what form of contact is preferred (email, personal meetings or phone calls), and how frequently to communicate. Turnover in either position requires a new discussion.

CONSTRUCTIVE DISAGREEMENT

Conflict is part of any successful relationship. The board chair and executive director should exemplify respectful disagreement and conflict resolution for the rest of the board and staff.

MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT

The board is fully informed about the state of the organization. The executive director provides regular updates and is comfortable sharing bad news, knowing the board leadership will help solve problems rather than assigning blame. The board is engaged in the governance of the organization and delegates day-to-day operations to the executive director.

FORMAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Mutually developed expectations along with policies and procedures help the board and staff leaders to work effectively within their separate but synergetic roles. The executive is generally authorized to act unless restricted by policy, so the board defines clear limits with input from the executive.

¹ Mary Hiland, PhD, "The Board Chair–Executive Director Relationship: Dynamics that Create Value for Nonprofit Organizations." *OD PRACTITIONER* Vol. 47 No.1 2015, P. 37. www.hilandconsulting.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ODP-V47No1-Hiland.pdf. Accessed 2-12-2016.



Nonprofit resource courtesy of

MAYES | WILSON & ASSOCIATES, LLC

www.MayesWilsonAssociates.com

©2016 MAYES | WILSON & ASSOCIATES, LLC