



Responsibilities of mission agency boards

TN5 Training Notes series: Structures

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These notes are designed to provide help for all Christian charitable organisations (whether trusts or companies limited by guarantee).

They give an outline of the responsibilities of the Trustees or the Council of Management of any Christian society. They form a suggested starting point from which the board of any organisation can write their own guidelines.

They are written from a range of source material in the Christian and voluntary sectors. Their emphasis, however, is on working in partnership with the executive and the staff team, each having a distinctive but complementary role. The aim has been to avoid the 'policing' language that is sometimes used (as this can create unhelpful tensions) and to inject a clear Christian dimension.

The role of the board

It is the role of the board to:

1 **Maintain a servant attitude**

- To work as servants of God, seeking his guidance, as the body entrusted with the oversight of the organisation's life and activities.
- To pray for the organisation, taking an informed interest in its activities.
- To work together as a team under the leadership of the one appointed to chair.
- To work in partnership and harmony with the team of staff, each body having its distinct role to play.
- To review regularly their own corporate performance and to seek external professional advice and training whenever necessary.

2 **Promote and protect the organisation's development**

- To work alongside staff in furthering the work of the organisation by all possible means so that everyone is fully committed to all key decisions taken.
- To support the staff team as they manage the organisation on a day-to-day basis, taking an interest in their life and work, praying for them, and being a source of encouragement to them.
- To ensure that the organisation pursues its objectives complying with its trust deed (or memorandum and articles), with all relevant legislation, and with Christian principles.
- To safeguard the good name, integrity and the agreed values of the organisation.

3 **Set a clear direction and keep this under review**

- To provide firm direction to the organisation as a whole by determining its purpose and vision; to agree its long-term plan through the setting of aims and budgets, having worked with staff in their formulation.
- To monitor performance against these aims and budgets with information provided by staff and to make necessary adjustments.
- To develop and agree policies and targets within the context of the plan, and to monitor these as above.

4 **Oversee the right use of resources**

- To assess staffing requirements, to appoint appropriate (executive) staff*, to monitor their performance and, if necessary, to dismiss them.
- To ensure the well-being of all staff through a proper HR policy (to include recruitment, support, appraisal, remuneration and discipline) following all legal, ethical and Christian requirements.
- To ensure that the organisation is effectively and efficiently run by the (executive) staff*, that it makes the correct and appropriate use of financial resources, that gift income is properly applied, and that the organisation fulfils all legal requirements.
- To fulfil their role as trustees of the property and investments of the organisation and all other statutory duties laid down in the foundation documents.

5 **Take individual responsibility**

These apply individually for each board member

- To attend all possible meetings of the board (including joint meetings with staff, working groups he or she is asked to serve on, and training sessions).
- To use specific skills, knowledge and experience in helping the board reach sound decisions.
- To be ready to provide proactive input for discussion and decision both at meetings and in periods in between.

- To act as an ambassador for the organisation within any available networks, involving some measure of time commitment outside normal meetings.
- To take an active interest in at least one specific area of the organisation's day-to-day work, praying for individual staff and providing support and encouragement.

It is not the responsibility of the board to get involved in the day-to-day management of the organisation, but instead to see that it is managed well through the appointment and monitoring of the (executive) staff*, and the setting and monitoring of strategy.

* Note: for a small organisation with only one or two employees, read 'staff' rather than 'executive staff' at these points.

Personal requirements

A **Personal qualities**

The personal qualities required of each board member are as follows (list taken from NCVO briefing paper). Each organisation will need to add whatever faith requirements are laid down in their foundation documents.

- a commitment to the organisation;
- a willingness to devote the necessary time and effort;
- strategic vision;
- good, independent judgement;
- an ability to think creatively;
- a willingness to speak his or her mind;
- an understanding and acceptance of the legal duties, responsibilities and liabilities of trusteeship;
- an ability to work effectively as a member of the team;
- Nolan's seven principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

B **Skills and experience**

The trustee body should possess skills and experience in the following areas:

- the type of work being done or service offered by the organisation;
- setting targets, monitoring and evaluating performance and programmes;
- human relations (HR) work and issues of employment;
- financial and property management and an understanding of legal matters;
- marketing and fund-raising in a Christian context.

For a different angle on this whole issue, I recommend the findings of Richard Chait, Thomas Holland and Barbara Taylor which are summarised in the NCVO paper ***Six key competencies which lead to board excellence***. This can be downloaded from the NCVO website at www.ncvo-vol.org.uk (click on Publications and search for the title).

It can be helpful then to add a statement about the corporate role of the staff team. One suggestion for this would be to repeat section 1 above with suitably amended wording, and to add two further sections, one on **Work within an agreed framework** (covering purpose, vision, budgets, values, etc.) and the other **Supply all information necessary for the oversight of the organisation** (plans, reports, etc). For a worked example, click [here](#).

Individual responsibilities for staff are given in job descriptions and monitored through a proper system of staff appraisal.

These notes are available at www.john-truscott.co.uk/resources/training/tn5.pdf. They cover one aspect of a possible event for trustees and board members on governance and meetings. For further resources specifically for board members see, for example, Training Notes TN35, *Causes of friction in mission agencies*. For indexes of all printed items available on the site, visit the [resources page](#).

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of his running an event for your board.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN5 under Structures.

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