



**ten basic
responsibilities**
of nonprofit boards

THE COMPANION WORKBOOK

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011941228

© 2012 BoardSource.
First Printing, October 2011
ISBN 1-58686-128-X

Published by BoardSource
750 9th Street, NW, Suite 650
Washington, DC 20001

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BoardSource®

Empowering Boards. Inspiring Leadership.

BoardSource envisions a world where every social sector organization has the leadership it needs to fulfill its mission and advance the public good. Our mission is to inspire and support excellence in nonprofit governance and board and staff leadership.

Established in 1988, BoardSource's work is grounded in the fundamental belief that boards are critical to organizational success. With decades of hands-on experience working with and supporting nonprofit boards, BoardSource is the recognized leader in nonprofit governance and leadership, and a go-to resource for nonprofit board and executive leaders. BoardSource supports a broad and diverse cross-section of social sector organizations with

- leadership initiatives addressing key opportunities and issues within the nonprofit sector
- research and benchmarking of board composition, practices, and performance
- membership and board support programs
- customized diagnostics and performance assessment tools
- a comprehensive library of topic papers, publications, and downloadable infographics, tools, templates and more
- live and virtual education and training
- governance consultants who work directly with nonprofit leaders to design specialized solutions to meet an organization's needs
- a biennial conference that brings together approximately 800 board leaders for two days of learning and sharing

A note to our global readers:

The need for effective board leadership and governance knows no geographic boundaries, and BoardSource is committed to strong social sector board leadership and governance around the globe. While BoardSource uses United States laws and policies as the legal framework for our resources and recommendations, most of our resources do not focus on legal matters but rather on good governance practices, making them relevant to organizations working outside of the United States. We do suggest, however, that you refer to applicable laws in your country regarding financial reporting and other legal and transparency issues.

BoardSource is a 501(c)(3) organization.

For more information, please visit our website at boardsource.org, e-mail us at mail@boardsource.org, or call us at 800-883-6262.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	1
INTRODUCTION.....	2
Who Should Use This Workbook?.....	2
Different People Learn, Well, Differently.....	3
How to Use This Workbook.....	3
CHAPTER 1: DETERMINE MISSION AND PURPOSES.....	4
Core Concepts	4
Questions	5
Group Activities.....	6
Case Study	6
Suggested BoardSource Resources.....	7
CHAPTER 2: SELECT THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE.....	8
Core Concepts	8
Questions	9
Group Activities.....	10
Case Study	11
Suggested BoardSource Resources.....	12
CHAPTER 3: SUPPORT AND EVALUATE THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE.....	13
Core Concepts.....	13
Compensation Worksheet.....	15
Questions.....	16
Group Activity.....	18
Case Study.....	18
Suggested BoardSource Resources	19
CHAPTER 4: ENSURE EFFECTIVE PLANNING	20
Core Concepts.....	20
Questions.....	20
Group Activities	21
Case Study.....	22
Suggested BoardSource Resources	23
CHAPTER 5: MONITOR AND STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS AND SERVICES	24
Core Concepts.....	24
Questions.....	26
Group Activities	26
Case Study.....	28
Suggested BoardSource Resources	29

CHAPTER 6: ENSURE ADEQUATE FINANCIAL RESOURCES	30
Core Concepts.....	30
Board Fundraising Culture Assessment.....	31
Questions	33
Group Activities	34
Case Study.....	34
Suggested BoardSource Resources	35
CHAPTER 7: PROTECT ASSETS AND PROVIDE FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT	36
Core Concepts.....	36
Questions	37
Group Activities	37
Case Study.....	38
Suggested BoardSource Resources	39
CHAPTER 8: BUILD A COMPETENT BOARD	40
Core Concepts.....	40
Questions	41
Group Activities	42
Board Matrix	42
Case Study.....	45
Suggested BoardSource Resources	46
CHAPTER 9: ENSURE LEGAL AND ETHICAL INTEGRITY	47
Core Concepts.....	47
Questions	49
Group Activity	50
Case Study.....	51
Suggested BoardSource Resources	52
CHAPTER 10: ENHANCE THE ORGANIZATION'S PUBLIC STANDING	53
Core Concepts.....	53
Questions	54
Group Activities	54
Case Study.....	56
Suggested BoardSource Resources	57
APPENDIX: TEN BASIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF NONPROFIT BOARDS	58

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This *Companion Workbook* would not have been possible without Richard T. (Tom) Ingram's excellent work on his book *Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards*. "Ten Basics" is BoardSource's flagship publication and bestselling book, by far. The combined sales of all editions exceed 215,000 copies, truly testimony to the book's enduring relevance to nonprofit board members around the world. BoardSource is grateful for Tom's invaluable contribution to nonprofit governance education.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards: The Companion Workbook*.

Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards, or “Ten Basics” as we at BoardSource fondly call it, is our most popular and enduring publication for one important reason: It states clearly and succinctly what nonprofit boards need to do to govern their organizations effectively. By diligently fulfilling those 10 responsibilities, boards perform the fiduciary and oversight tasks that organizations entrust them with.

But how?

This *Workbook* can help.

It offers you questions, tips, and activities to bring those responsibilities to life. It’s intended to help you and your board dig in to each one and find out what it really means, where the rubber meets the road — in the boardroom.

The *Workbook* is not intended to replace the book. Think of it as a concordance; you’ll still want to read *Ten Basics*, before you tackle the *Workbook*, and keep it on hand for reference as you work through the questions and exercises.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS WORKBOOK?

The *Workbook* may be used by individual board members and chief executives or by full boards. As an individual board member, you might reflect on the questions associated with each of the responsibilities, and, if some of them resonate with your own board’s experiences, go ahead and raise them in the boardroom. Here’s an example:

Under “Responsibility 1: Determine Mission and Purpose” (page 5), you’ll be asked to “List three possible changes in your environment or your organization’s circumstances that might cause you to reconsider your mission statement’s adequacy or appropriateness.”

Your answer may be that your mission appears to be on solid ground, or perhaps there have been some environmental changes that would suggest a need to reevaluate your mission statement. If so, you’ve identified something important to share with the rest of the board.

The *Workbook* is also geared for group activities. For example, under “Responsibility 5: Monitor and Strengthen Programs and Services”, you’ll find the following group activity (see page 24):

Break up into small groups and examine a list of your programs. Discuss the following questions:

- a. Which programs should be self-supporting?
- b. Which programs are self-supporting?

- c. Which programs operate at a loss?
- d. Of the programs that operate at a loss, which are core to our mission?
- e. Should any of these programs be discontinued or modified?

The lively discussion that will likely ensue may uncover some important issues you and your fellow board members hadn't considered.

DIFFERENT PEOPLE LEARN, WELL, DIFFERENTLY

We all have different backgrounds and perspectives, which is great in the boardroom because these differences ensure a variety of viewpoints and methods of problem solving and decision making. Another way people differ is in their learning styles, and here the *Workbook* has something for everyone.

Many people learn best by reading to themselves and absorbing the information from the printed page. Those folks will particularly appreciate the “Core Concepts” sections. For each of the 10 responsibilities, we've extracted the nuggets of wisdom and created a précis that you can sink your teeth into.

For people who prefer more feedback and learn best via talking things out, we've added pertinent questions to each responsibility in order to ignite discussion and debate. And those who like a variety of approaches will find enough case studies, exhibits, tips, and ideas in each responsibility to stimulate and engage them.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

Two words: Dive in.

Really, there's no one right way to use the *Workbook*. It exists only to help your board understand and enact those 10 critical responsibilities. If it works best for you to tear out a sheet and pass it around your boardroom, go for it. If you prefer to sit quietly and absorb it, great. And, if you're motivated to suggest that your fellow board members all buy their own copies, we certainly won't object.

Read it, write in it, share it, debate the questions; discuss the case studies — substitute your own situations and maybe solve some problems — have fun with the exercises, rinse and repeat.

Start anywhere; there's no rule that says you have to start at the beginning (“Determine Mission and Purposes”). Your organization started with a mission, but you don't have to. Maybe your board is struggling with fundraising; you might want to start with “Responsibility 6: Ensure Adequate Financial Resources”, and knock those ideas around. Or you could plan to discuss one section, one responsibility, at each board meeting.

The most important thing to do is to begin. We hope that when you do, you find the *Workbook* an educational and fun tool for raising your board's awareness and ultimately, practice, of good governance.