



## Five Ways to Make Working Boards Work Better

If your organization is all-volunteer or has one or two staff, then board members, in addition to governing, also fill staff roles. These boards are usually described as “**working**” boards.

Working boards are often quite successful organizing direct service program activities and finding volunteers to staff them – after all, it is enthusiasm for the cause that stokes the passion of their volunteers. It’s not terribly hard to recruit volunteers to cut trail, recruit speakers or serve meals.

But raise money? Get out the newsletter? Serve as the IT department? Process the mail? Who wants to volunteer for those jobs?

A tough challenge for all-volunteer nonprofits is to find people to do the work that isn’t seen as fun. That’s why in most large organizations, these are the jobs staff are paid to do (and even paid staff moan about the difficulty of getting volunteers to participate in fundraising).

**Here are five tips to help all volunteer boards accomplish important administrative and fundraising tasks.**

### **1. Assign each board member and each committee a concrete goal to achieve.**

You’ve got real work to accomplish -- money to raise, memberships to renew, programs to deliver.

So don’t hand over fuzzy assignments to people or committees. If you need the fundraising committee to raise \$25,000, make that their assignment. If you’ve got five open slots on the board, make sure that the nominations committee is given the task of finding five excellent new board members.

In working boards, never recruit board members “at-large.” Instead, recruit every board member for a purpose and give them an assignment... and by that I mean a significant outcome they are responsible for delivering.

### **2. Stop dumping everything on the board president... and conversely, board presidents please ask for help.**

Too frequently, all of the critical jobs in an all volunteer organization default to the board president. Because we

ask our presidents to be super humans, they don't have the time to define volunteer jobs, find recruits or structure committee assignments. So they find it easier to "do it myself." How often have you heard that said! (I've even said it)

So, I find that a board governance committee is a great asset even in an all volunteer organization. Think of that committee as the board's human resource department. Share with them the responsibility of building a great board... and great committee volunteers.

### **3. Make volunteer jobs manageable.**

The "other-duties-as-assigned" catch-all is okay if you paying staff. But it's virtually impossible to recruit unpaid volunteers to such open ended assignments.

Here's an example. If you are chairing a conference committee, recruit an able team and split up the work. Make one person responsible for recruiting the speakers, someone else responsible for booking the facilities, another person for day-of logistics. I'll bet that after two or three organizing meetings, your committee won't even need to meet face-to-face. You can hold phone or email meetings to check in that everyone is on track.

### **4. Recruit volunteers who have technical expertise, high standards of personal responsibility and can manage themselves.**

All-volunteer boards can't afford too many volunteers who need a lot of handholding. That's not to say that you don't need to train new people to get them off to a good start (which is where committees come in) but make sure that the most important outcomes go to people you know will get the job done. It is okay to set high expectations and not to settle for any warm body.

### **5. Don't assume that administrative, finance and fundraising tasks are never fun.**

One of our problems in finding recruits is that we start out with the idea that these are loathsome tasks. And we recruit with that idea in mind.

But lots of people make a living — one they even enjoy — doing these jobs. Some are unique to nonprofits but others may be comparable to the for-profit sector. You'll just need to train your volunteers in the special cultural and legal requirements of nonprofits.

### **6. Oh yes, have fun. And please thank your volunteers.**

No one wants to keep coming back to an organization that doesn't appreciate their help. Or where every task feels like a terrible burden. Make sure to take the time to socialize, celebrate and acknowledge the great work that you are doing.

#### **There are volunteers are out there for you.**

You just have to find them and give them something important to do.

P.S. You don't have to put every volunteer on your board. Some people are very willing to do complex and time consuming tasks only if you don't ask them to be on the board.

#### **About Cause & Effect Inc.**

We're here to help you make a bigger difference in the world. Our consulting services can strengthen your board, improve your programming, build stronger relationships with your supporters through communications, or boost your revenues. We work with secular and progressive nonprofits and public agencies through a broad range of consulting services. Contact us at [info@ceffect.com](mailto:info@ceffect.com).