

**“Best of” Firelight Newsflashes! 25 August 2009 –
Working with Boards**

Dear partners and colleagues,

A quick message to let you know that the Firelight Newsflash will take a break during our team's busy time of grant docket preparation. During this time, we will be re-sending prior Newsflashes that received good feedback from our grantee-partners. Today, see the Newsflash from July 2007 on working with boards.

We'll return on Monday, 14 September with brand new Newsflashes.

Best,
The Firelight Team

From: Firelight Newsletter <newsletter@firelightfoundation.org>
Date: July 9, 2007 2:17:53 PM PDT
To: newsletter@firelightfoundation.org
Subject: Firelight Newsflash! 9 July 2007 - Special Edition on Working with Boards

Dear grantee-partners,

Greetings from Firelight! When talking to partners, we often hear about the challenges you have in working with your boards. We're bringing you this special edition of the Firelight Newsflash in response. We hope the information below can begin to help your organization work more effectively with its board. The first step is understanding more about board members' possible roles and responsibilities. Using their dedication, enthusiasm, and hard work, board members can help directors, staff and volunteers meet new challenges as your programs grow and the social context changes.

Also, some additional website links are included below for further reading.

Enjoy!
The Firelight team

Working with Boards of Directors to Strengthen Your Programs

The tasks of staff and volunteers can be made easier if you have a dedicated, active board with diverse backgrounds and experience who can provide guidance and direction for the many decisions which are needed to keep your organization effective and responsive to the communities it serves. Board members and managerial and field staff and volunteers need to work together collaboratively and use their mutual strengths to enhance the sustainability of your organization. Below, please see some key aspects of working with boards:

Why do organizations need a board?

- Boards are often required by law.
- Boards provide oversight functions, to act as guardians of the "public trust."
- Boards promote the organization's cause.
- Boards help to raise funds.

Key areas of responsibility for boards are:

- Developing a strategic plan;
- Supporting the leadership and growth of the organization;
- Providing financial oversight;
- Maintaining community and government relations;
- Ensuring that high-quality services are provided; and
- Managing its own board activities.

Matching the Role of the Board with the Stage of Organizational Development

New organizations typically start out with a small number of beneficiaries, a small budget and few staff. At some point, organizations often formalize their relationship with community members and local advisors by creating a management board or board of directors. In the early years, the board is often composed of the founding members of the organization who work on a volunteer basis at the grassroots level. But as an organization grows, your needs inevitably change. More mature organizations often operate at a wider geographic level and serve a larger number of people. Therefore, these organizations require the input of a larger, more diverse board made up of individuals with special skills to establish and shape the mission and policies of an organization. The following table represents a summary of the different types of boards that are appropriate for organizations at 3 different levels of development:

Stage of Organizational Development	Type of Board	Board Functions
Emerging	Informal group of community volunteers	Works directly with staff who carry out the daily work of the organization.
Growth/Consolidation	More formal advisory board or small board of directors	Oversees development of organization's mission, policies, and operations.
Sustainable	Large board of directors with established sub-committees	Shapes mission and policies, raises money, and oversees organization's financial and programmatic performance.

Helping the Board Grow with the Organization

As organizations grow, the issues you face become more varied and complex. The guidance and special expertise provided by an effective, active board will be critical to your success. Board members must continually attempt to develop their skills, and must stay well-informed about the organization's activities as well as the needs and interests of the government and community. They will need these skills to help the director and his or her staff to develop and implement effective and sustainable programs.

An effective board of directors will make the mission and purpose of an organization more significant as it guides your organization toward achieving its goals in a constantly changing environment. Strong boards will provide good leadership, instilling the organization's staff with enough courage and risk-taking to help them face the challenges of the future. Board composition should be diverse to reflect the community being served, the agencies with which the organization collaborates, and the specific experience the organization needs to carry out its work effectively. Boards must serve as advocates for their organization and help the organization obtain the funds it needs to operate.

Management of Board Activities

A board must have procedures that allow it to carry out its responsibilities effectively. It should also be involved in activities that help the board members stay interested and well-informed about the organization's work. Among other responsibilities, board members need to periodically review the composition of their board to make sure that it is made up of people with diverse skills and experience that are needed by the organization. As the organization grows and changes, the board will need to recruit new board members. To conduct its business, the board must create committees, such as a finance committee or a public affairs committee, which permit board members to work on special issues

critical to the organization's future. Finally, the board must periodically evaluate its own performance, and make changes to increase its effectiveness in serving the organization's needs.

Board Responsibilities	Management Responsibilities
Establish criteria for selecting new board members with skills and experience appropriate to the organization's needs. Recruit, select, and educate new board members.	Work with the board to establish a process for selecting new board members. Search for and recommend qualified candidates to the board.
Search for board members with strong leadership qualities and diverse background and skills.	With the board, identify leadership development needs and provide the necessary training.
Develop meeting agendas (with executive director) and conduct board business.	Meet regularly with the board president to develop meeting agendas and to plan presentations.
Structure the board so that it can perform its duties, through committees, working groups, use of outside expertise, etc.	Provide necessary staff support for all board activities.
Evaluate board performance periodically.	Provide technical support for evaluating board performance.

One-minute quiz for Board Members

Effective boards help to guide and support an organization, rather than manage its day-to-day activities. Consider giving your board members the following 1-minute quiz at your next board meeting to see if they are clear on their roles & responsibilities:

1. Can you describe the needs of these children, families & communities served by the organization?
2. How does the organization address these needs?
3. What is the role of the organization in relation to that of other organizations providing services in the area?
4. What is the current financial position of the organization?
5. How are board members helping the organization to grow?

For more information:

This content is adapted from "Working with Board of Directors", found at the following website:

<http://erc.msh.org/mainpage.cfm?file=2.3.1.htm&module=chs&language=English>

Also see:

Free Toolkit for Boards:

<http://www.managementhelp.org/boards/boards.htm>

Board Development (training, accountability & governance)

<http://www.boarddevelopment.org/>

Fundamentals of Effective Board Involvement

<http://www.mentoringcanada.ca/training/boards/index.html>

As part of the Firelight Foundation's Monitoring, Evaluation and Technical Assistance (META) Program, Firelight provides "Newsflashes" to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. Past editions of the Firelight Newsflash can be found on our

website: <http://www.firelightfoundation.org/newsflash.htm>.

We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at newsletter@firelightfoundation.org.