

Allocating Tasks Among Volunteer Board Members

Volunteer Boards (VBs) face unique challenges. They include:



1. They receive no stipend, nor compensation for their time or travel
2. They are asked to make (sometimes significant) financial contributions to the organization as a condition of membership
3. They may not have the right skills or experience, but are passionate about the mission and want to help
4. The quality of their contributions (except for their financial giving) is typically not assessed. There are no consequences for exceptionally good or bad performance
5. They are hard to fire!

Volunteer boards require a lot of work from their members. It usually falls to the board Chair to decide which members will be assigned to what tasks. This can pose a dilemma: how to best use the resources present on the board to get each task completed most effectively and efficiently, without wasting these precious resources?

What too often happens is that critical tasks get assigned to the wrong people. This because sometimes only certain members are available; or certain members have a personal interest in working on a solution even though they don't have the necessary qualifications. It can be awkward for the Chair to tell someone they are not the right person to work on a specific task. But it's necessary - to avoid wasting resources, time or efficiency.

So – how to best allocate tasks among members of a volunteer board?

First, know what knowledge and capabilities reside on your board. This is an ongoing challenge – continually know as much as you can about each board member. Which member(s) have the skills and abilities to accomplish any specific task?

Carefully define what needs to be done, and break more complex solutions down into specific component tasks. Now you can allocate each component to one or more board members who possess the necessary capabilities to get that specific task accomplished.

For bigger tasks or problems, you can either appoint one board member to integrate all the activities involved in the larger task or solution, or retain that role for yourself. Either way it's critical to the full accomplishment of the task at hand.

Your primary roles as board Chair are to 1) understand the challenge to be solved; 2) identify the skills and capabilities necessary to overcome the challenge, and 3) know enough about your board members to identify which members are best qualified to get the job done. Now you can allocate the component tasks in any problem or challenge to the most appropriate board member(s).

Finally, understand this is not always easy – individual board members often have personal interests and preferences which cause them to push back against task allocation decisions made by the Chair. Resolving these conflicts requires all the diplomacy inherent in the job of Chair of a volunteer board; and it's a critical measure of being a successful Chairperson.

Written by Warren Wilhelm

*We hope this post is the catalyst for a larger conversation about this topic as well as other challenges facing Volunteer Boards. Please "comment" with your thoughts. Other articles in the series can be found on LinkedIn **#VolunteerBoards** or at www.larrysolow.com.*