

## Self Assessment Tool for Community Development Organizations

### **Governance**

Nonprofit organizations are governed by their boards of directors. In newer organizations the board may need to help the nonprofit's operations; in more mature nonprofits, the board articulates policy, agrees to a budget, and hires and oversees the executive director. Ultimately, boards are responsible for the health and growth of their organizations.

**The Bottom Line on Governance:** Better decisions can be made by an informed board, structured and constituted for success, and committed to advancing the organization's mission.

### Questions and Implications

#### **Are all board members familiar and in agreement with the current mission statement?**

Nonprofits are mission-driven corporations. A strong sense of mission energizes and focuses the organization. Lack of one is a red flag for many organizations.

#### **Is the organization's board knowledgeable about the current programs, services and fiscal situation?**

Informed governors make better decisions. Staff and board leadership needs to ensure that all board members get the information they need to stay informed.

#### **Does the board contain a sufficient range of leadership, expertise and experience to make it an effective governing body?**

Governing a nonprofit business requires skills involving business operations, finances, legal responsibilities, community relations and decision-making. While organizations at different stages of development require different activities for board members, at any stage the board needs to be comprised of individuals who add positive value to the organization.

#### **Do board members understand how to make decisions for the good of the organization?**

Some organizations, even some that have achieved success, do not have boards that can make decisions easily or well. This red flag can undermine all attempts to improve the nonprofit and may have to be addressed before anything else.

#### **Does the organization provide new board members with a thorough orientation that includes member responsibilities and important program and administrative information?**

An orientation gives new board members the information they need to govern well. Orientation is also the beginning of their relationship with the nonprofit and is the time when they should be cultivated to maximize their ongoing involvement.

**Do board members receive clear and succinct agendas and supporting written material in a timely manner prior to board and committee meetings?**

Better decisions are made when board members have the opportunity to review pertinent information. They usually appreciate the courtesy as well.

**Do committee assignments reflect the interests, experience and skills of the board members?**

Committees help a multifaceted organization govern itself better, especially larger organizations or those that need frequent board action for activities such as property acquisition approval.

**Are board and committee meetings well organized, productive and a good use of board members' time?**

Poor meetings sap energy, commitment and good spirits. Part of the board leadership's responsibilities is to structure and lead effective meetings.