



The Role of the Board

Community associations are unique entities, and the boards that lead them fill unique roles.

- Community association boards consist of officials elected to represent and protect the best interests of their constituents.
- Community associations are corporate entities whose board members must maintain the value of a jointly owned asset.
- Community associations are social entities—neighborhoods of people who expect the board to preserve, if not improve, their quality of life.

Ultimately, the role of the board is to protect and increase property value. This is accomplished by operating the association, maintaining the common property, and enforcing the governing documents.

Qualities of a Good Board Member

A Strong Board Member

- Good character
- Strong integrity
- Calm judgment
- Willingness to serve
- Committed to the best interests of the community as a whole
- Relevant experience or background
- Previous volunteer service
- Strong “people skills”

A Weak Board Member

- Unable to put the welfare of the community first
- Works behind the board to run things his or her way
- Impulsive or quick tempered
- Has a personal or hidden agenda
- Puts individual interests first
- Little or no experience in management, leadership, or service
- Unable to work with others for the common good
- Ineffective with others

How do you succeed with such a challenging assignment?

Put your personal preferences and circumstances aside.

When you make decisions as a board member, you have an obligation to work in the best interest of the entire community, regardless of how they affect you personally.

Educate yourself. Part of learning how to be a good board member will come from trial and error; but, you can reduce the errors and the time it takes you to get up to speed by attending seminars, reading books, networking with community association board members, asking questions of your manager, accountant, or attorney, downloading free materials from the web, and much more. [See the Appendix for a detailed list of educational opportunities and resources.]

Know the difference between the roles of the board and the manager. Boards set policy and make policy decisions. Managers implement the board’s directives and take care of operations.

Stand united. Once the board makes a decision, stand behind it and make every effort to see it succeed—even if you voted against it.

Don't allow personality differences to interfere with the work of the board. Be cooperative, positive, and make every effort to stay focused on the needs of the community.

Be reasonable. Although boards have a big responsibility, they needn't be over zealous or inflexible to fulfill it. Avoid snap decisions, act rather than react, and deal with real problems, not nuisance situations.

Boards vary in size, but most comprise five to seven elected homeowners. Among themselves they appoint officers, of which the three primary positions are president, secretary, and treasurer. (Each of these officer roles is explained in more detail in the following sections.) Decisions are made by the board as a group, not by individuals or by officers.

WORKING WITH COMMITTEES

Boards can't always accomplish everything that needs to be done—particularly in large communities. That's when committees of residents become especially valuable. There are two types of committees.

Ad hoc committees:

- Task oriented
- Disband when the task is completed

Standing committees:

- Function oriented
- Remain in force indefinitely

The duties of a committee vary from one community to another, depending on what the task is, when it should be completed, how many and what kinds of recommendations the board wants from the committee, and how much authority the committee has been given by the board. Boards should develop a set of clearly articulated guidelines for the structure, function, and responsibility

of each committee. In addition, there are steps boards can take to promote a committee's success:

- Form a new committee only to meet a specific need.
- Act on committee recommendations.
- Recognize committee chairs and committee members for their time, efforts, and contributions to the community.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

The role of the board is as much about building the social and civic well-being of the community as it is about maintaining common areas or enforcing rules. To do this, a board must:

- Provide leadership and inspiration, not merely administration.
- Instill a sense of caring, civic pride, and shared responsibility in all residents.
- Position the association as a wellspring of resident volunteerism in community-related activities, both inside and outside the association's boundaries.
- Transform housing units into vibrant neighborhoods and communities.

How to Be a Community Builder

- Maintain perseverance and determination.
- Set a tone that is light-hearted and fun.
- Collaborate with the community at large.
- Help others in need.
- Build community traditions.

By placing an emphasis on community, boards transcend the legalistic nature of their governing documents. Thus, efforts to build a sense of community tend to reduce the number of administrative issues such as rules violations and delinquent assessments.



Cautions

Being selected to a leadership position can give some people a false sense of importance. It's important for board members to remember that they have a serious responsibility to serve the community, not their egos.

Telling a professional manager how to do his or her job is a waste of the manager's expertise and the association's money. It's important for boards to focus on setting policy and leave the implementation of those policies to the manager.

Don't assume residents are satisfied if they're not showing up for community meetings or casting votes for board positions, or that they're content because the association isn't hearing any complaints. It's important to understand that resident apathy is not a good thing.

Protect yourself from board burnout. Recruit volunteers in your community to serve on committees to accomplish some of the work required.

TOOL 2.1: Take the Board Burnout Test on the next page to make sure you stay a healthy board member!



FOR MORE HELP

Available online at www.caionline.org/bookstore.cfm or call (888) 224-4321 (M–F, 9–6:30 ET).

Introduction to Community Association Management, Governance, and Services, Guide for Association Practitioners #1, by Clifford J. Treese. (Community Associations Institute, 2002.)

Building Community: Proven Strategies for Turning Residents into Neighbors. (Community Associations Press, 2005.)

Community Association Leadership, a Guide for Volunteers. (Community Associations Press, 2002.)

To download a PDF of the entire Board Member Tool Kit, go to www.caionline.org/toolkit.

The Board Burnout Test

1. Do you find it difficult to fall asleep at night, even though you feel tired much of the time? YES NO
2. Do you often fall asleep at board meetings? YES NO
3. Is your blood pressure too high? Does your back ache? Is your stomach chronically upset? YES NO
4. Have you given up hope that anyone will ever show appreciation for your work? YES NO
5. Are your concerns about your community association interfering with your employment? YES NO
6. Are you solving homeowners' problems, but letting your personal life fall apart? YES NO
7. Do you often feel that the homeowners are out to get you? YES NO
8. Do you believe that you had better get them before they get you? YES NO
9. Have you requested an unlisted phone number due to homeowner calls? YES NO
10. When a homeowner greets you, do you question his/her ulterior motive? YES NO
11. If you make a mistake, do you usually find someone else to blame? YES NO
12. Are open meetings a source of anxiety and stress for you? YES NO
13. Do you frequently "tune out" what other people are saying? YES NO
14. If your ideas are challenged, do you "lose your cool"? YES NO
15. Have you developed an "I don't really care" attitude? YES NO
16. Do you spend most of your time at social functions discussing association business? YES NO
17. Do you try to avoid social functions out of fear that homeowners may seize the opportunity to complain? YES NO
18. Do you envy homeowners who have more free time than you? YES NO
19. Are you convinced that you are the only board member doing any work? YES NO
20. Do you often wonder why you ran for the board in the first place? YES NO

TOTAL

_____ YES _____ NO

If your "yes" responses outnumber your "no" responses, you may be burned out.