

The Role of the Board

From *The Board Member Tool Kit*, Community Associations Institute, 3d ed.

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 the community as a whole.
- 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”

An Inappropriate 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
- Poor interpersonal skills

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 Appendix A 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.

THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

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 the task, 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.

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.

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.**

! Cautions

Committees report to the board and are neither, in and of themselves, autonomous nor do they have authority to act and make decisions. They are not bound by the same legal responsibilities that bind the board, and they cannot speak for the board or operate in an equal fashion.

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.