**Effective Not-for-Profit Boards**

Rex Mitchell, 6/26/19

Effective not-for-profit (NFP) organizations have effective boards, characterized by the following attributes:

1. Strong strategic orientation

2. Effective board processes, including meetings

3. Regular assessment, including board assessment

4. Healthy attention to board development

5. Excellent board recruitment processes

6. Building relationships

7. High participation levels

1. Strong strategic orientation: Research has found that high-performing boards are twice as likely to invest substantial board meeting time to strategic considerations, compared to the average. Almost all of these highly effective boards are operating under an organizational strategic plan. These top-performing boards with a strong strategic focus also had healthier membership and budget growth – and their leadership was more stable.

They set and work toward high-level goals. The goal-setting process is thorough, thoughtful, and focused on creating impact. Effective nonprofits let their high-level goals be the guiding light. This process is taken seriously: goals are proposed, discussed, and written down – then a method to evaluate progress and success is assigned to each goal.

They prioritize. This practice goes hand-in-hand with setting goals. For effective nonprofits, the goals they outline are paramount. They are successful because they prioritize projects, programs, partnerships, and work that will help them achieve their goals above everything else. Being effective at prioritizing is essential to being effective as an organization.

2 & 3. Effective board processes, informed by regular assessment: They create and use effective processes, including board meetings (we will address meetings in more detail today). They regularly assess performance of the organization and of the board – and use the results to modify and improve the ways they work. They create a healthy culture to create the kind of board they want it to be.

4. Commitment to and healthy attention to board development, including leadership skills development: The high-performing boards are twice as likely to set board-level performance goals for themselves, twice as likely to invest in board development activities such as mentoring and training, and almost twice as likely to engage in formal or informal board self-assessment.

5. Effective board recruitment processes: Effective boards recruit new board members broadly, they screen prospective board members and hold competitive elections rather than voting for a single slate. NAMI-SFV has become an excellent model in this regard.

6. They build relationships: Relationship-building is at the center of what effective nonprofits do. They realize that they can do more when they have a strong network of support. Through cultivating supporters and developing business partners, they are able to accomplish more than they could do otherwise. They maintain relationships beyond making “asks.”

7. High participation levels: Board members are actively engaged with the organization and advocate for it and its purposes. They have ongoing dialog among themselves, with staff and volunteers, and with other stakeholders. They are well-prepared for meetings and participate effectively in ways that add value. They create a healthy culture within the board and the organization.

*The single biggest way to impact an organization is to focus on leadership development.*

*There is almost no limit to the potential of an organization that recruits good people,*

*raises them up as leaders and continually develops them.*

-John Maxwell (American author)