DEVELOPING THE CAPACITY OF THE BOARD CHAIR:

Chair’s Role in Board-ED Relations

Feb. 7, 2013
Key Topics of Discussion

- Hiring, supporting and evaluating the Executive Director (ED)
- Developing the Board – ED partnership
- Acting as primary liaison for the ED
Complexity of ED Role

Point of contact for 3 stakeholder groups with diverse demands & expectations:

1. **For staff and volunteers** = leadership; implements mission through programs and services
2. **For Board** = implements strategic plan; provides operational reports
3. **For community** = fundraises; is public face
Stakeholder Relations = more out than in office

- Builds alliances and coalitions
- Mobilizes diverse constituencies
- Networks
- Creates mutual commitments to goals
- Negotiates and bargains for resources
- Advocates for change; influences public policy
Increasing Expectations of ED Competencies

- social media
- competition
- public policy
- culture of learning
- creativity and innovation
- adaptability
- application of research
- media relations
- political savvy
ED Challenges

- Isolation … uniqueness of ED role
- Powerlessness to effect change … ultimate authority rests with Board
- Lack of a clear role … Bd. vs. ED expectations
- Tunnel vision … mired in day-to-day

From:
The Management of Nonprofit and Charitable Organizations in Canada, Vic Murray
More Challenges

- Everybody’s counsellor/confidant … where does the ED go for support?
- Compensation … not #1 but may be final straw
- Unreasonable expectations from stakeholders … ED burnout
Board – ED Relations

- Board sets prudent/ethical limits on the means available to the ED to achieve the mission
- ED is empowered to make decisions
- ED is accountable for organizational performance
- ED is accountable to Board as a whole, not to individual members
Keys to Success

• Board + ED = leadership team: governance and management
• Board supports ED’s work at appropriate level. E.g. fund development; external relations; advocacy.
• Board avoids micromanagement or rubber stamp
What Causes Negative ED Turnover?

Boards/funders contribute to ED burnout
→ lack of strategic partnership
→ Boards don’t challenge ED to grow
→ lack of funder support for operations

Financial sacrifices too high
→ compensation too low
→ compensation based on budget, not market
→ can’t afford to retire
Chair as Primary Liaison with ED

• **Frequent contact**: phone; email; coffee = understanding of complexity of ED role

• **Sounding board** for professional challenges

• **Strategist** for ED discussions with Board
Chair as Primary Liaison

- **Ongoing feedback** on performance: performance appraisal is a dialogue, not an annual event
- **Shared** public face (mutual attendance at funder meetings; meetings with politicians; social functions)