

# Breaking Up is Hard To Do – Especially with a Volunteer or Board Member!

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Nonprofit Leadership 2026 Annual  
Conference



**Rooted Together**

[www.nonprofitleaders.info](http://www.nonprofitleaders.info)



# Welcome



- ❖ Begin and End on time
- ❖ Q & A after presentation
- ❖ Slide deck (Hidden slides)
- ❖ Free Advice and Counsel



# Today's Agenda



- ❖ Volunteer or Board Member?
- ❖ First Things First – Policies
- ❖ Why We Hesitate
- ❖ Reasons for a Board Member or Volunteer to Leave Voluntarily
- ❖ Reasons for a Board Member or Volunteer to Leave Involuntarily
- ❖ Letting Go
- ❖ Nonprofit Resources

# Volunteer or Board Member?



Is this a group of volunteers  
or board members?



What about  
this group?



They are **BOTH** volunteers and board  
members!

# Board Members are Volunteers!



- ❖ According to the [National Council of Nonprofits](#), “The vast majority of board members for charitable nonprofits serve as volunteers without any [compensation](#).”
- ❖ Therefore, board members should follow all the procedures as any other volunteer!
- ❖ *Why is this necessary?*

# Breaking Up with a Board Member



The rules for dismissing a board member are similar to that of a volunteer.



With the exception that while removing a volunteer may be done by any staff member, removing a board member requires the decision of the full board.

# First Things First - Policies



## **Volunteer**

Attendance

Role and Responsibility

Reasons for dismissal

Expectations

Evaluations

## **Board Member**

Attendance

Role and Responsibility

Reasons for dismissal

Expectations

Evaluations

# Volunteer Policies and Procedures



- ❖ Dress Code, Conduct and Safety
- ❖ Attendance and Time
- ❖ Change of Placement
- ❖ Service Requirements
- ❖ Leave of Absence
- ❖ Orientation & Training
- ❖ Evaluation
- ❖ Recognition
- ❖ Record Management



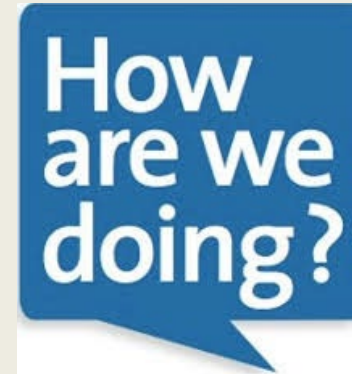
# Volunteer Job Descriptions



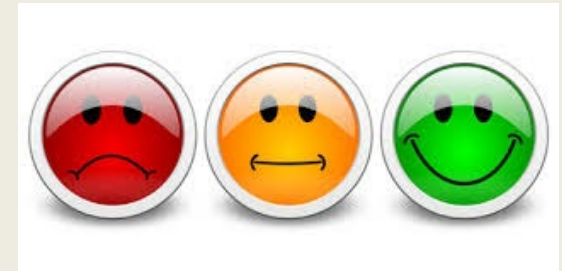
- ❖ Project Goal
- ❖ Tasks
- ❖ Necessary Skills
- ❖ Location, Setting
- ❖ Schedule
- ❖ Training and Supervision
- ❖ Include Purpose of the Opportunity
- ❖ Authored by the Volunteers
- ❖ CYA – Risk Management



# Volunteer Evaluation



- ❖ How're we doing?
- ❖ Supervisor evaluates volunteer
- ❖ Volunteer evaluates supervisor
- ❖ Supervisor and volunteer evaluates volunteer manager



# Dismissing a Volunteer



- ❖ Clearly communicate expectations and responsibilities.
- ❖ Provide feedback on performance and areas for improvement.
- ❖ **Document** any issues or concerns related to the volunteer's conduct.

# Dismissing a Volunteer



- ❖ Hold a meeting to discuss performance issues and allow for a response.
- ❖ Offer a chance for improvement before proceeding with dismissal.
- ❖ Follow up with a formal written notice outlining the reasons for dismissal.

# Bless and Release



Good for the staff?



Good for the organization?



Good for the volunteer?



Good for the volunteer coordinator?

# First Things First - Policies



## **Volunteer**

Attendance

Role and Responsibility

Policy for dismissal

Expectations

Evaluations

## **Board Member**

Attendance

Role and Responsibility

for dismissal

Expectations

Evaluations

# Effective *Nonprofit* Board Member



Commitment to the ***mission*** of the organization.

Understanding of the board's ***governance roles***.

***Active involvement*** in board activities, committees.

***Thinking and acting strategically***; not involved in day-to-day management of the organization.

Abiding by the Duties of ***Care, Loyalty and Honesty***.

Supporting the organization both ***financially*** and through ***advocacy***.

# Board Commitment Letter



- ❖ Restate individual board member job description.
- ❖ Includes **ALL** board members' commitments:
- ❖ Written and Signed annually by full Board.
- ❖ Board Chair responsible for distribution and regular evaluation



# Annual Board Evaluation



Purpose is to verify members are meeting expectations, making progress toward goals, following bylaws, and a chance to gather feedback on the board's health.



Self-Assessment Tool



Peer to Peer Assessment (Commitment Letter)



<https://boardable.com/blog/board-evaluations/#what>

# Why Do We Hesitate?



- ❖ The two biggest things holding people back from firing low performers are **1) disruption and 2) false niceness.**
- ❖ It's ok to have high expectations for volunteers and board members.
- ❖ Recognize your responsibility to the organization.
- ❖ Nonprofits are supposed to be about kindness, right?

# Do You Want to be Nice or Kind?



## Nice

- Never want to rock the boat
- Most concerned with not upsetting someone
- Afraid to speak up when they witness unkind behavior
- Worried about being liked

## Kind

- Willing to make waves.
- Most concerned with doing what is right
- Willing to speak up and take a stand
- Worried about being kind

[www.KindnessGrowsHere.com](http://www.KindnessGrowsHere.com)



# Tips for Handling Conflict



- ❖ Disagree with the idea, not the author
- ❖ If you disagree, seek clarification rather than confrontation – ask questions, rather than statements
- ❖ Humor can reduce tension
- ❖ Express disagreement with sensitivity
- ❖ Separate the author’s personality from their ideas
- ❖ Focus on commonalities and build on that
- ❖ Ask those opposed to find a common approach
- ❖ If there is a true conflict, postpone decision-making or appoint a task force to review

# Reasons NOT to Hesitate?



Nonprofits need to have high standards because we have very important work to do.

We don't sell widgets (no offense to widget makers). Nonprofits save the world. This means we must have high standards for our volunteers AND our boards.

# Reasons for a Board Member or Volunteer to Leave



It's time – They want to leave voluntarily.

End of their term

Negligence - Not completed their basic responsibilities

Incompetence – Cannot perform their duties

MIA - Skipping meetings

Agitator - Breeding dysfunction within the staff or the board.

# Reasons for a Board Member or Volunteer to Leave



Unethical -  
Acted  
unethically or  
criminally

Malfeasance –  
Damages the  
public trust

Disrepute –  
Damages the  
organization's  
reputation

Undermining the  
mission – Acted  
contrary to the  
mission

Law-breaking –  
Convicted of a  
criminal offense

# Board Members - Leaving Voluntarily



- ❖ The most common way for board members to leave is to not renew their term.
- ❖ Term limits establish how long a board term lasts in the bylaws.
- ❖ Some states have laws on the length of these terms, but the **most common term length is 3 years**.
- ❖ Many nonprofits allow board members to serve consecutive terms
- ❖ When a board member leaves, it's common for them to help recruit their replacement.

# Board Members - Leaving Voluntarily



- ❖ If a board member wishes to leave the board before the end of their term, most bylaws allow the board member to resign formally.
- ❖ Usually, this resignation process requires the board member to send a resignation in writing to the rest of the board, whether it's via email or mail.

# Board Members – Leaving Involuntarily



- ❖ **Follow the procedures outlined in your bylaws**
- ❖ Have they missed the required number of meetings or otherwise been derelict in their duties?
- ❖ Do you have documentation that shows this?
- ❖ Removal of a board member must be done in a board meeting with a quorum of board members present.
- ❖ Do your bylaws require a majority or a percentage of the vote for a decision?



# Document. Document. Document.

- ❖ Follow Human Resource procedures
- ❖ Take notes at meetings
- ❖ Send an email following the meeting outlining what you think was said at the meeting.
- ❖ Consider recording meetings
- ❖ Always take this seriously!

**Document Everything**



# Board Tenure



- ❖ *Term Limits. Term Limits. Term Limits.*
  - ❖ New blood, ideas, connections, \$\$\$'s
  - ❖ Remove deadwood
  - ❖ Hold board members accountable
- ❖ Average tenure is 3 years, renewable once.
- ❖ Retire to Advisory or Emeritus Status.

# Deal with Unproductive Volunteer and Board Members



- ❖ *You get what you accept and what you reward!*
- ❖ One bad apple....
- ❖ Term limits critical.
- ❖ Maintain commitment letters.
- ❖ Keep performance expectations high.



# Letting Go



- ❖ Parting ways can be a difficult decision.
- ❖ **Always** follow the procedures and handle the situation with maturity and respect.
- ❖ This process can be unpleasant and involve damaging relationships, so consider this ahead of time.



# Nonprofit Resources

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# Mary Beth Harrington, CVA



501c<sup>3</sup> Empowering Nonprofits

**San Antonio Area Foundation**

**TANO – Texas Association of Nonprofit Organizations**

Austin Public Library Foundation

**Volunteer Center of North Texas (Volunteer NOW)**

Dallas Public Library

Carter BloodCare

4.17.2026

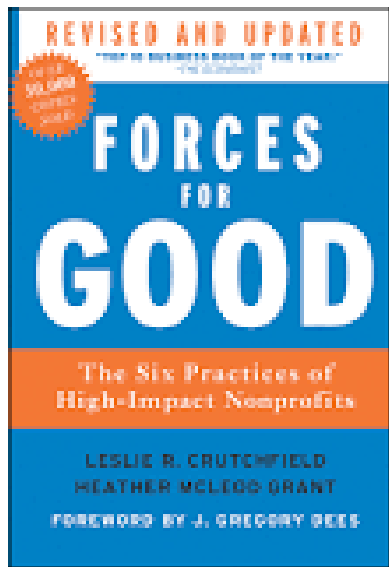
Presented by  
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# Clients Include...



- ❖ Habitat for Humanity International
- ❖ Meals on Wheels of America
- ❖ US Tennis Association (USTA)
- ❖ Susan G. Komen
- ❖ Nonprofit Association of Washington
- ❖ Arkansas Literacy Council
- ❖ AFP Oklahoma and Texas
- ❖ Texas CASA
- ❖ Texas Association of Museums
- ❖ One Star Foundation/AmeriCorps
- ❖ United Way of Texas
- ❖ USTA Texas
- ❖ Corporation for Public Broadcasting
- ❖ Keep Texas Beautiful
- ❖ Literacy Texas
- ❖ Texas Library Association
- ❖ Junior League of Texas
- ❖ San Antonio Nonprofit Council
- ❖ League of Women Voters
- ❖ NAMI
- ❖ Lewis County Autism Coalition
- ❖ Thurston County Food Bank



Authors: Leslie Crutchfield and  
Heather McLeod Grant

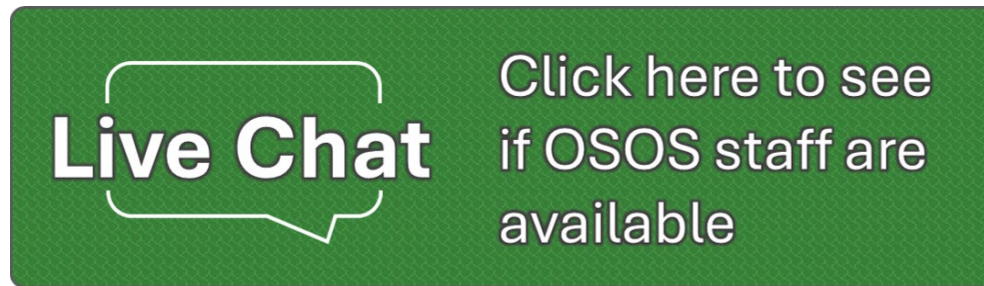


1. Advocate and Serve
2. Make Markets Work
3. Inspire Evangelists
4. Nurture Nonprofit Networks
5. Master Art of Adaptation
6. Share Leadership

# Washington Office of the Secretary of State



## ❖ Corporations & Charities



<https://www.sos.wa.gov/corporations-charities>

# Washington Office of the Attorney General



❖ <https://www.atg.wa.gov/charities>

❖ WASHINGTON NONPROFIT HANDBOOK:  
How to Form and Maintain a Nonprofit Corporation  
in Washington State  
July 2022 Edition

<https://www.sos.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/2022-Nonprofit-Handbook.pdf>

# Washington Office of the Attorney General



## ❖ Charity and Nonprofit Board Service

<https://www.sos.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/2023%20QuickGuide%20for%20Board%20Service.pdf>

# Washington State Department of Labor and Industries



- ❖ Who is a **Volunteer**?
- ❖ [Workers' Compensation for Volunteers](#) – 7.5 cents per hour worked
- ❖ Who is an **Employee**?
- ❖ Help for [Small Business](#)
- ❖ [Safety and Health](#)

<https://lni.wa.gov/>

# Washington State Gambling Commission



- ❖ Licensing
- ❖ Raffles
  - ❖ Only certain charitable or nonprofit organizations can offer raffles
  - ❖ Selling tickets
  - ❖ Rules of play
  - ❖ Advertising

<https://wsgc.wa.gov/>



# Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board



- ❖ [Special Occasion License FAQs](#)
- ❖ [Raffle Permits](#)
- ❖ [Liquor Forms and Applications](#)
- ❖ [Applicant FAQs](#)

<https://wsgc.wa.gov/about-us/contact-us>



- ❖ The National Council of Nonprofits issued the following statement today in response to the Internal Revenue Service’s request to allow churches and other houses of worship to endorse political candidates, an action that carves out an exemption from the longstanding prohibition against partisan political activity by 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations.

<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/pressreleases/statement-national-council-nonprofits-irs-request-allow-churches-endorse-political>



# LEADING WITH INTENT: BOARDSOURCE INDEX OF NONPROFIT BOARD PRACTICES



# Nonprofit Association of Washington



- ❖ Convenes a powerful network of nonprofit organizations across Washington State to learn, advocate, and collaborate, so that nonprofits can achieve their missions.
- ❖ Through participation in our network, nonprofits (staff, board, and volunteers) become more sustainable and effective.

<https://nonprofitwa.org/about-us/>

# South Sound Partners in Philanthropy



- ❖ Founded in 2000, South Sound Partners for Philanthropy is a coalition of over 40 nonprofit organizations dedicated to advancing philanthropy in the South Sound region.
- ❖ South Sound Partners provides regular education and training sessions to both members and the community at large so new and innovative ideas are brought to the forefront.

<https://celebrategiving.org/>

# *FREE ADVICE AND COUNSEL*

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