

# Boards in Gear



## Unlocking the Why, What, Who, and How of Nonprofit Boards

A project of:



**Featuring expert speakers:**

**Amara Oden**, Amara Oden Consulting

**Howard Donkin**, Jacobson Jarvis PLLC

**Laura Pierce**, Laura Pierce Consulting

**Nancy Long**, 501 Commons

**Rebecca Sherrell**, Office of the Secretary of State

**Rebecca Zanatta**, RJZ Connections

**Sara Lawson**, Shorthand Consulting

**Susan Howlett**, Boards on Fire

**Support provided by:**

Cedarmere Foundation

Office of the Secretary of State

Community Foundation of North Central Washington

# Introduction



Boards in Gear draws on the information and insights provided in these resources. We encourage you to explore them further.

## 501 Commons

Best Practice Materials for Nonprofit Boards  
<http://www.501commons.org/resources/tools-and-best-practices/boards-governance/501CommonsBestPracticesforBoards.doc/view>

## Alliance for Children and Families

The Commitments of High-Impact Nonprofits  
<http://alliance1.org/commitments/commitments-high-impact-organizations>

## Association of Fundraising Professionals

Code of Ethics  
<http://www.afpnet.org/files/ContentDocuments/CodeofEthics.pdf>

## Boardsource

Leading with Intent: A National Index of Nonprofit Board Practice  
<https://www.boardsource.org/eweb/dynamicpage.aspx?webcode=LeadingwithIntent>

## Colorado Nonprofit Association

Principles & Practices  
<http://www.coloradononprofits.org/help-desk-resources/principles-practices/>

## Minnesota Council of Nonprofits

Principles & Practices for Nonprofit Excellence  
<http://www.minnesotanonprofits.org/PrinciplesPractices.pdf>

## For more information:

Nancy Bacon - Director of Learning  
Washington Nonprofits  
120 State Avenue #303  
Olympia, WA 98501  
nancy@washingtannonprofits.org  
[www.washingtannonprofits.org](http://www.washingtannonprofits.org)  
(855)299.2922

**Looking for key documents?** Visit the Boards in Gear webpage: [www.washingtannonprofits.org/boardsingear](http://www.washingtannonprofits.org/boardsingear).

## National Council of Nonprofits

Everyday Advocacy  
<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy>

## Nonprofit Association of the Midlands

Guidelines & Principles  
<http://www.nonprofitam.org/?page=GuidelinesPrinciples>

## Social Venture Partners

SVP Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool  
<http://socialventurepartners.org.s3.amazonaws.com/www.socialventurepartners.org/sites/40/2013/10/SVP-Org-Capacity-Assessment-Tool-2006.pdf>

## Stand for Your Mission

A Discussion Guide on Advocacy for Boards  
<http://standforyourmission.org>

## Standards for Excellence Institute

Standards for Excellence: An Ethics and Accountability Code for The Nonprofit Sector  
[www.standardsforexcellenceinstitute.org](http://www.standardsforexcellenceinstitute.org)

## Wayfind

Nonprofit Legal Self-Assessment Checklist  
[www.wayfindlegal.org](http://www.wayfindlegal.org)

*Links last updated 10/1/2015*

## With gratitude...

*A special thanks to project advisor Sara Lawson, UW Evans School graduate student Kristofer Bitney, and nonprofit leaders Charo Garcia de Portaro and LaTraya Ellis.*

*Boards in Gear was funded by Cedarmere Foundation, the Office of the Secretary of State, and the Community Foundation of North Central WA. We are grateful for their support.*

*Boards in Gear was inspired by nonprofits in Washington. Thank you for all you do!*

# Introduction



You care about your organization’s mission. You want your organization to survive and thrive and make a difference in your community and the world beyond. You want your volunteer hours as a board member to make an impact on the issues you care about. In short, you want your board to get in gear so that together you can drive your organization where it needs to go.

*Boards in Gear* – which intentionally abbreviates to BIG in recognition of the large role that boards play in an organization’s success—was designed to provide actionable information and tools that elevate board practice. It is guided by three core values: quality, simplicity, and accessibility. The information contained in BIG comes from a range of sources and has been vetted by nonprofit experts working directly with boards. From these resources, we have identified key questions and main ideas, making BIG accessible to the diverse boards working in communities across Washington.

As you approach BIG, keep in mind these themes:

★ **Start from where you are.** Organizations have life cycles, just like any living thing. They are created, they grow, they plateau, and sometimes they die. The work of an organization’s board is guided by where that organization is in its life cycle and what is happening around it. Its role and scope are heavily influenced by whether there is staff in place or if it is an all volunteer endeavor.

★ **Ask 3 kinds of questions.** Boards guide their organizations to achieve their missions within a landscape of other organizations, funding limitations, and changing demographics, among other elements. To effectively navigate this landscape, boards need to ask questions that demonstrate their three key roles as stewards, strategists, and sense-makers of their missions.



## **Oversight: Stewards of the organization**

Technical work: What’s happening? What’s wrong? Are we compliant with our legal obligations? Look under the magnifying glass.



## **Foresight: Strategists for the organization**

Strategic work: Where are we going? What’s the plan? See through the binoculars.



## **Insight: Sense-makers for the organization within a bigger cause**

Big picture work: Why do we exist? What will best move our mission forward over time within our changing communities and world? View the horizon through the telescope.

In each chapter, we have given examples of how these roles relate to the topic.

★ **Create a culture that aligns people, resources, and connections towards your mission.** Culture is defined as the way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists within an organization. We experience culture in three ways: the “artifacts” (visible things you see, like agendas, name tags), actions (behaviors you see, words you hear), and assumptions (unspoken, assumed perceptions or beliefs). Effective boards create a culture that best serves its mission.

# Introduction



These BIG materials are organized in five topics, each answering a basic question about the **why, what, who,** and **how** for your organization.

Each BIG topic includes three sections:

- ★ **KNOW:** What board members should know about the topic
- ★ **SHOW:** How a board or its members can demonstrate understanding
- ★ **GROW:** What a board and its members can ask and do to improve its practice

Each topic includes a VIDEO, supporting KIT, and a PATHWAY guide to help organizations gauge their board's practice and get ideas for improvement. Don't forget the Boards in Gear GAME too!

## Why does your organization exist and why do you serve on its board?

**1: CONNECTION TO CAUSE:** Board members place the work of the organization within a larger context, understanding the circumstances that cause the organization to exist. They are aware of others working in the same space and are able to give voice to stories, challenges, and opportunities that exist for the people their organization serves. Page 6

## What is the job of a board member?

**2: RESPONSIBILITIES:** Board members fulfill their responsibilities, from setting a clear mission to ensuring the impact of that mission. The board ensures that the organization is compliant with all federal, state, and local requirements and conducts activities with accountability and transparency. Page 11

## Who serves on the board and who works to reinvigorate the board over time?

**3: COMPOSITION & DEVELOPMENT:** A nonprofit board ensures that the board itself has the characteristics and qualifications needed to effectively represent the people that the organization serves and the organization's needs. Page 19

## How does a board operate to achieve its mission?

**4: OPERATIONS OF THE BOARD:** The board operates in a way that allows the organization to achieve its mission effectively and efficiently. Page 26

**5: FUNDRAISING:** Board members ensure that the organization has the necessary resources to sustain its work over time. For many boards, this involves an active role in fundraising, often with the help of staff. Page 32

# Board Calendar



	Connect to Cause	Responsibilities	Composition & Development	Operations	Fundraising
<p><i>Annual activities for your board to plug into your organizational calendar.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Write down everyone connected to your mission. Use this map across board functions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Review budget</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sign conflict of interest policy</li> <li><b>Federal:</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> File IRS Form 990</li> <li><b>WA Secretary of State:*</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> File <u>corporation</u> annual report</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Incorporation month</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> File <u>charities</u> annual renewal</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>11 mths following accounting year end</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Review process to recruit and select board members</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Schedule orientation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate the board.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create learning plan for board members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create a meeting calendar that encourages attendance.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lay out plan for evaluating Executive.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Discuss whether this year is the year for a strategic plan.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Schedule training for officers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Connect the budget to fundraising.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create individualized plan for board members.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Update print resource for board members.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Share list of donors.</li> </ul>
<b>JANUARY</b>					
<b>FEBRUARY</b>					
<b>MARCH</b>					
<b>JUNE</b>					
<b>JULY</b>					
<b>AUGUST</b>					
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>					
<b>OCTOBER</b>					
<b>NOVEMBER</b>					
<b>DECEMBER</b>					

Exact requirements may be different depending on your type of organization: [www.sos.wa.gov/\\_assets/charities/CharityComplianceRequirements.pdf](http://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/charities/CharityComplianceRequirements.pdf)

# Board Action Map



Before we start, let's make note of your **biggest challenge** to help focus on the most important things to accomplish.

Each *Board in Gear* chapter includes a Pathway that describes where you are now and where you can go. Your goal is to move your board to “good” or “great” within a timeframe that works for your organization. Once you have worked through all of the chapters—or the chapters most of interest— this “Board Action Map” will help you take action. It summarizes and prioritizes your notes on the “Getting to Good and Great” chart at the end of each chapter.

## AFTER YOU HAVE WORKED THROUGH BOARDS IN GEAR...

Think about your biggest challenge. **What 3-5 ideas, actions, or documents do you want to move forward?** Note them here. Make sure to add them to your work plan, calendar, or meeting agendas.

Chapter	Let's Celebrate! What you are doing well	Let's Go to Work What you want to work on	Let's Be Sure It Happens By Whom and By When
<i>Connection to Cause</i>			
<i>Responsibilities</i>			
<i>Composition &amp; development</i>			
<i>Operations</i>			
<i>Fundraising</i>			

One week from now, I will \_\_\_\_\_.

By 3 weeks from now, \_\_\_\_\_.

One year from now, \_\_\_\_\_.