

Wesley Foundation Boards

The information contained in this checklist is based on the *GBHEM Resources for Training Your Board*, and current nonprofit literature highlighting the characteristics of effective boards and governance. The purpose of the checklist is to emphasize board practices that lead to more effective performance and build confidence and trust in the board.

All boards have three legally required responsibilities or duties that are traditionally described. The Duty of Obedience asks that board members be faithful to the organization's mission. The Duty of Care asks that board members be active participants in the management of the agency, including financial accountability. The Duty of Loyalty asks that board members give undivided allegiance to the organization, regardless of personal differences.

While campus ministers are the directors of the Wesley Foundation, they are “ex-officio” members of the board with voice but not vote. They should not fill the role of the board chair. This creates a natural conflict of interest, as the board has the responsibility to evaluate the performance of the director and must be able to independently evaluate the director’s plans or agendas.

An Effective Board Checklist

Effective boards are clear on roles and responsibilities;

- All board members should have a job description that specifies their role and responsibilities. Board service is a job and while members are volunteers, they have the right to expect other forms of compensations: a sense of fulfillment, the opportunity to learn new skills, and the privilege of being part of an effective team.
- All new board members are entitled to an orientation. Lacking a proper orientation can result in new board members sitting on the sidelines for months or perhaps years while they attempt to piece together their role and responsibilities. Some options are:
 - An orientation event to allow new members to talk through the governing directives, their job description, past minutes, etc. This event should include the opportunity to communicate with the staff, students and constituents.
 - A buddy system where continuing board members are designated to mentor incoming members. This could include personal visits and phone calls after the first few meetings to debrief what happened.
 - A board retreat to get away from the usual meeting place to discuss strategic issues that are often not covered at regular board meetings and focus on long range planning.

Effective boards insist on receiving a *written agenda* at least one week before their meetings which includes:

- An opportunity for board members to add items or suggest revisions to the agenda
- Proposed resolutions or options (the board can always change the wording or start over with a new resolution)
- Items for discussion or vote, including supportive information.

- Background material (material handed out at board meetings rarely receives the attention it deserves)
- The financial report even if it is preliminary
- Written reports - which should not be re-read at the meeting, although appropriate questions may be asked.

Effective boards distribute minutes following each meeting which:

- Record only adopted resolutions-not discussion and not defeated resolutions (unless formally requested by board members)
- Do not record individual votes (unless a board member requests that her or his yeas, nay or abstention be recorded). The board speaks with one voice
- Are sent out within 10 days after the meeting so that board members' memories are fresh enough to correct any inaccuracies

Effective boards work on building consensus. They avoid using Robert's Rules of Order to exercise power in a group.

- Consensus decision making is a creative and dynamic way of reaching agreement between all members of a group.
- Instead of simply voting for an item and having most of the group getting their way, a consensus approach is committed to finding solutions that everyone actively supports - or at least can live with.
- Consensus makes sure that all opinions, ideas and concerns are considered, by listening closely to each other, and working to come up with proposals that work for everyone.
- Consensus is neither compromise nor unanimity. It aims to go further by weaving together everyone's best ideas and most important concerns. This process can result in surprising and creative solutions, inspiring individuals and the group as whole.

Effective boards conduct formal, written self-assessments to evaluate their effectiveness. Well conducted assessments lead to better boards. Results include:

- A better understanding of what it means to be an effective board
- Clarification of what board members expect of each other and the director
- Identification of problems, potential issues, and areas to improve
- An opportunity to discuss and solve problems that may hinder board performance
- A summary of board accomplishments
- Identification of strategies to enhance board performance
- A means to set board goals and objectives for the coming year.

The Wesley Foundation Local Board Training Website www.wesleyboardresources.org was developed by the Local Board Committee of the Board of Higher Education and Camps Ministry (BHECM) of the UMC Virginia Annual Conference.