

Governance Resources

Governance is the responsibility of a Board of Directors. The essential components of effective governance are:

- Thinking Big – strategic oversight and planning
- Finances – ensuring an organization has the financial resources it requires, including responsibility for effective fund raising
- Operations – ensuring effective operations in an organization
- Human Resources – ensuring recruitment and retention of effective staff and volunteers
- Community Relations – developing and nurturing effective relationships with the community, however defined

In carrying out governance functions, Boards have opted for a variety of models or approaches, generally depending on the size and resources of an organization, its history and the context in which it operates. Over time, there has been a growing distinction made between strategic and operational responsibilities with strategic concerns being primarily the focus of Boards and operations – the activities that bring strategic direction to life – primarily being the focus of staff. Smaller organizations with few staff often see some blending of these roles and, in organizations with no staff, one sees “working boards” that have to take on both strategic and operational functions. In all cases, however, clarity regarding roles and responsibilities is critical. How the strategic and operational functions relate to each other – and the parallel issue of who has responsibility for what - has been the turning point upon which different “models” of governance have emerged.

It would be fair to say that, today, there is no commonly agreed “best model” of governance, and that we see, instead, the emergence of blended approaches that attempt to be responsive to organizational conditions. Having said this, there are “best practices”, which can be adapted to a variety of governance approaches.

There are a huge number of resources available on-line about governance. Here are some that may be of assistance to you:

[Imagine Canada](#) has great resources on-line. In particular, you may wish to look at their [Standards Program for Canada's Charities and Nonprofits](#). This set of standards form the backbone of their accreditation program and can be used to help fine tune your governance and management practices or it can be used to seek accreditation from Imagine Canada. Either way, it is an invaluable resource and has helpful standards set out in relation to governance.

Boards of Directors looking to improve their governance can check the following 2 sites:

The Chartered Professional Accounts of Canada have a series of resources on-line that can be used by nonprofit Boards to hone their governance skills. They are organized as a series of 20 questions Boards should be asking about a range of issues, e.g., 20 questions about

governance; 20 questions about Board recruitment; etc. You can locate these resources at <https://www.cpacanada.ca/en/Search-Results?q=not-for-profit%20%20questions> .

Dalhousie University's College of Continuing Education offers a Not-for-Profit Leadership stream and provides a range of helpful on-line resources that can be sourced at <http://www.dal.ca/faculty/cce/programs/non-profit-sector-leadership/non-profit-resources.html>

The [National Study of Board Governance Practices in the Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector in Canada](#) by Grace Bugg and Sue Dallhoff of Strategic Leverage Partners Inc. in partnership with the Centre for Voluntary Sector Research and Development contains good insights into what effective Boards do.

Charity Village (www.charityvillage.com) is generally an excellent place to start looking for resources for nonprofits. The site contains a very broad set of resources, including a number of articles about Boards, models of governance, and issues faced by Boards and Board members. Click [here](#) to take a look at what they have to offer by clicking on the Topics tab in the menu on their home page.

Board Liability: [Volunteer Canada](#) has an excellent resource that will assist Boards and individual Board members concerned about the issue of liability. Download [Directors' Liability: A Discussion Paper on Legal Liability, Risk Management and the Role of Directors in Non-Profit Organizations](#) to get a good oversight on liability and risk management issues.

If you need support or consultation regarding governance issues, contact the [Coordinator of the Halton Nonprofit Network](#). HNN will be able to help you determine how best to move forward on an issue through their own consulting service or referral to someone else with expertise in your area of concern.