

Good NPO governance - how committed board members are key

The board is ultimately responsible for the governance of an NPO and can contribute to its success or failure. Unaware of this, many South African non-profit organisations (NPOs) do not pay sufficient attention to recruiting and nurturing their board members, according to Inyathelo, The South African Institute for Advancement.



Feryal Domingo, operations director, Inyathelo

“New NPOs are constantly being registered, set up with the best of intentions to help those who are in need,” says Inyathelo operations director Feryal Domingo. “Our experience, however, is that both new and long-established NPOs are frequently ill-informed about the need for effective governance, and the role of a board.”

This can result in NPOs losing registration status and benefits; misunderstandings amongst the governing body and operational staff; mismanaging their financial affairs; incurring penalty fees for not submitting documents on time to public offices, and losing out on potential funding from donors due to non-compliance.

“A strong board with well-recruited and involved board members will help prevent such problems, in turn boosting donor confidence and increasing the opportunities to attract resources.”

Building relationships with potential recruits

The process of identifying new board members can be time-consuming. Even when there may be no apparent reason to recruit new members, it is still important to use this time to build up relationships with potential future recruits, Inyathelo advises. Potential board members need to embrace the same values as the NPO and identify with its vision and objectives. The more structured the recruitment process, the better the chances of recruiting an effective board member.



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Every NPO should develop a list of the skills, experience and background required for its ideal board. Once the board has identified where it currently falls short, it can establish priority areas that need to be addressed when recruiting new

members. The board should ideally have expertise in subjects such as governance, financial management, law, marketing, fundraising, administration and human resources.

Incoming board members should receive an overview of the NPO's past and present activities; information on current funders and the funding position; financial statements and operational policies; an overview of the NPO's legal status; an overview of the board's governance responsibilities; and a tour of the NPO workplace and facilities.

"Inyathelo has many useful resources and services to help NPOs ensure good governance and effective boards," says Domingo. "We offer publications, workshops, training, one on one clinic advisory sessions, and more. NPOs are welcome to make an appointment to see us at our offices in Woodstock, Cape Town, or make use of our online resources. Many of our services are free."

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