

# Understanding Boards

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Carver (1997) points out that the function of advisory boards is to council organizations. Advisory boards “advise” the organization and staff. They help provide direction to ensure that organizations maintain their relevancy and continue to fulfill their missions.

Specific annual responsibilities of advisory boards are to:

- Review the organization’s mission and purpose. The board is responsible for reviewing the local program’s goals, objectives and primary audiences served.
- Develop the resources necessary to implement high quality programs.
- Ensure legal and ethical integrity and maintain accountability.
- Monitor, evaluate and strengthen the existing program.
- Enhance the organization’s public standing.

## **Importance of Community Leaders’ Involvement in Local Organizations**

The Leadership Advisory Board (LAB) that serves Texas Cooperative Extension in each county should be comprised of community leaders who will carry out the responsibilities listed above.

These community leaders are sometimes referred to as power actors, key leaders, influentials and legitimizers. These individuals are known for their ability to exercise their social power (the capacity to control the actions of others).

Every community has influential people who play an important role in community decision making. Such individuals are found in government, education, agriculture and business. These people represent the opinions of the general population and people look to them for leadership. It is these leaders who should be targeted to serve on advisory boards.

Several studies have helped determine the characteristics of opinion leaders who serve on community leadership advisory boards (Watson and Lionberger, 1967 and Nix and Serley, 1973). These leaders are:

- better educated;
- more successful in business/job;
- long residents of their communities;
- influential in more than one interest area; and
- able to see the community from a broad, general perspective.

Tait, Bohlen and Wedman (1975) concluded that the characteristics of power actors do not change significantly over time. These are not concrete characteristics, however, just points to help guide the advisory board selection process.

### **Selection Criteria / Membership**

An advisory board is an organized body of volunteer leaders, typically 10 to 20 citizens of the county. Each member serves a 3-year term. Membership should be staggered so that one-third of the members rotate off the board every year.

Members should be carefully selected to represent:

- each major geographic area of the community;
- each major social and economic group in the county;
- major interests in the organization; and
- expertise related to the organization's subject matter.

### **Board Member Responsibilities**

- Attend all board meetings and functions
- Be informed of the organization's mission, services, policies and programs.
- Review the agenda before meetings and be ready to contribute to discussion at the meetings

- Serve on sub-committees and offer to take special assignments as needed
- Inform others about the organization
- Work with the organization's personnel to recruit new advisory board members
- Keep up-to-date on developments concerning the organization
- Help the board carry out responsibilities such as long-term visioning, reviewing financial statements, and advocacy of the organization

It is important to think about these concepts when developing boards and establishing boards that work.

### **References**

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