

the Membership Management *report*

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THE MONTHLY IDEA SOURCE FOR THOSE WHO RECRUIT, MANAGE AND SERVE MEMBERS.

ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

Weighing the Advantages, Disadvantages of Board Sizes

When it comes to boards for your member organization, size definitely matters.

“Because there are pros and cons to both bigger and smaller boards, I’ve found the most effective boards are only as large as necessary to achieve the organization’s mission,” says Pamela S. Harper, president, Business Advancement Inc. (Glen Rock, NJ).

Following are pros and cons Harper has seen with various boards:

Bigger Boards:

Pros

- Consists of individuals who represent different stakeholder groups.
- A large board can more thoroughly address needs and interests which leads to better service and stronger commitment.
- A diversity of perspectives and expertise which enables boards to thoroughly consider issues and make quality decisions.
- Individuals with different skills and connections provide boards with increased resources and capabilities for fundraising, programming, finances, legal issues and other areas.

Cons

- With more viewpoints, a stronger potential for gridlock in decision-making exists. Stakeholders can become entrenched in their own issues and be unwilling to work for the benefit of the board and organization as a whole.
- With many schedules to coordinate, it can be difficult to get everyone to attend meetings.
- A few individuals can dominate discussions during meetings. While it may seem they achieved consensus, hidden resistance may cause problems during a project’s implementation.

Smaller Boards:

Pros

- It’s easier to generate a high level of participation during meetings and a more candid discussion of issues.
- With fewer schedules to coordinate, it’s easier to get regular attendance at meetings.
- Decision-making can be faster if members agree on key issues.

Cons

- Small boards may be missing a critical stakeholder representation. This increases the risk of making insular decisions that are out of touch with other member’s reality.
- Existing board members may need to wear more than one hat, resulting in extra stress. This can lead to high turnover and lack of ability to recruit new members.
- If the board is missing essential knowledge, skills and abilities, it won’t be able to function effectively to achieve its mission.

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