

Some of the Best Books on Nonprofit Boards and Governance (2007)

An Annotated Bibliography from the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership

There is an increasing number of useful books available on nonprofit boards and nonprofit governance. This list identifies fifteen books on nonprofit governance (most recent, a few classics), all of which offer useful insights into the work and performance of boards. Not all of these are in agreement; part of the value of this list is to offer a range of readings voicing different perspectives on boards and governance.

Andringa, Robert C., and Ted W. Engstrom. 2002. *Nonprofit Board Answer Book: Practical Guidelines for Board Members and Chief Executives*. BoardSource.

Andringa and Engstrom offer brief and practical information on a wide range of practical questions about nonprofit boards and how they should work, such as how a board should be structured, what is the chief executive's role in training a board, and many more. Although some answers are too basic to serve every kind of boards, their information is useful for the average board and its members.

Carver, John. 2006. *Boards That Make A Difference*. (Third Edition) Jossey-Bass.

Carver's revised book outlines a refined approach to his unique model of governance, which he labels "policy governance." The approach focuses particularly on governing boards as policy makers whose responsibility is to establish boundaries and parameters within which the organization and its chief executive operate, and presents strategies for developing board policies and practices to strengthen role clarity and improve the board efficiency and effectiveness.

Carver, John, and Miriam Carver. 2006. *Reinventing Your Board*. (Revised Edition) Jossey-Bass.

This book, which is a useful companion and follow-up resource guide to the *Boards That Make A Difference* book, provides more information about and explains how to redevelop an existing board to effectively implement Carver's "policy governance" model for board effectiveness.

Chait, Richard P., Thomas P. Holland, and Barbara E. Taylor. 1993. *The Effective Board of Trustees*. Oryx Press.

These three authors are leading researchers in the field of governance in nonprofit and educational organizations. This book presents their model of boards and board effectiveness, and explains how to develop and sustain high levels of board performance and impact.

Chait, Richard P., William P. Ryan, and Barbara E. Taylor. 2004. *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards*. BoardSource.

This is one of the newest of books on nonprofit boards and governance. Building on nation-wide research, the authors argue for understanding governance as three interrelated but distinct types: fiduciary, strategic, and a newly-explained type referred to as generative governance. Each type is explained from the perspective of what it is, how boards might best approach the work of the type, and how board meetings might be organized to help a board successfully implement each type.

Duca, Diane J. 1996. *Nonprofit Boards: Roles, Responsibilities, and Performance*. Wiley & Sons.

This book provides a relatively basic yet comprehensive overview of the design and work of nonprofit boards and how they can provide effective leadership to their nonprofit organizations. Included are discussions on legal and organizational roles, structures, board development, and effective board staff-relationships.

Herman, Robert D., and Richard Heimovics. 1991. *Executive Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations: New Strategies for Shaping Executive-Board Dynamics*. Jossey-Bass.

This classic book is considered a seminal work on the description of "real-life" dynamics of boards and their leadership, with particular emphasis on the importance of effective executive-chair and

executive-board relationships. The book offers a model of board effectiveness that is grounded in extensive research on the work of nonprofit boards by the authors.

Holland, Thomas. 1996. *How To Build a More Effective Board*. BoardSource.

This "Research in Action" booklet of BoardSource explains the six core competencies of effective boards and discusses strategies for building capacity in each competency. The booklet also offers general information on board development and effective board planning and development retreats.

Holland, Thomas P., and David C. Hester. *Building Effective Boards for Religious Organizations*. Jossey-Bass.

Holland and Hester have taken the best of Holland's general work on nonprofit boards and tailored it to apply to church and other religious organization boards. The book offers an overall picture of what religious organization boards should do, how to organize and implement them, how to develop existing boards, and what can be done to address problems that arise as they operate. The book offers practical advice grounded in research on a variety of religious organizations.

Houle, Cyril O. 1989. *Governing Boards: Their Nature and Nurture*. Jossey-Bass.

Houle presents a classic perspective on governance, boards, and the roles and functions of boards and their members. The book is readable and relevant, although its perspective is more prescriptive and focused on "what should be" versus "what really is" practiced in typical boards.

Light, Mark. 2001. *The Strategic Board: The Step by Step Guide to High Impact Governance*. Wiley.

This book offers a relatively comprehensive description of the typical nonprofit board, the challenges and problems it is likely to confront, and strategies for helping to address them and enhance board effectiveness. It is written from the perspective of an experienced nonprofit CEO.

Olsen, Charles M. 1995. *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders*. Alban Institute.

Olsen presents a unique perspective on the challenges and unique issues associated with the development, leadership, and operation of boards of churches. Based on an extensive study by the author, the book articulates a new approach for revitalizing church boards.

Pointer, Dennis D., and James E. Orlikoff. 2002. *The High-Performance Board: Principles of Nonprofit Organization Governance*. Jossey-Bass.

This book provides a model for understanding the practice of governance in nonprofits, and provides a comprehensive set of principles that articulates the design and operation of an effective governance system. Their very complete model applies best to the boards of nonprofits with staff, and provides excellent self-assessment exercises and development strategies.

Scott, Katherine Tyler. 2001. *Creating Caring and Capable Boards: Reclaiming the Passion for Active Trusteeship*. Jossey-Bass.

Scott presents a model of board leadership and development that focuses on the spirit and practice of leadership and trusteeship, and their roles in the practices and development of effective boards. The book includes useful assessment forms, and explains the operational steps for using them in a special board development approach they refer to as PLANT.

Widmer, Candace, and Susan Houchin. 2000. *The Art of Trusteeship: The Nonprofit Board Member's Guide to Effective Governance*. Jossey-Bass.

This book is a very readable yet relatively comprehensive basic guide to board service and the challenges of board effectiveness in modern nonprofits. Widmer and Houchin offer a very understandable explanation of the organization and work of the board, the roles of its members, and some ideas for strengthening board performance and success.