

# How to Involve Former Board Members

Many boards struggle when a valuable board member's term is up and it seems a waste to let him or her fade into the distance. The board member's experience and insight could still benefit the organization but the bylaws don't include a structured way to make this happen. Here are some ideas for showing appreciation for former board members' service. Invite them to continue their commitment in a different capacity within the organization.

## **Benefits of a Structure**

Being prepared, when a valued board member's term is up, allows the board to seize an opportunity or to avert an awkward situation. By defining necessary policies in the bylaws, the board is ready to act when it wants to invite a retiring board member to continue service. Equally, with set policies, it is easier to allow a non-active member to go through the normal weeding process of term limits. A structure also provides interested board members with a way to express their willingness to continue service in a different capacity. The bylaws should define the new role of former board members and a manner in which these members are appointed.

## **Emeritus Status**

An "emeritus" director is usually a former board member who is invited to stay on board as a non-voting member in an advisory capacity. This is an honorific title in recognition of the member's active participation, financial contribution, or continuing strong interest in the organization. Often former board chairs are granted this title automatically. An "honorary" director has a similar status but may also be a distinguished outsider whose affiliation with the organization would be welcome.

## **Advisory Council**

The creation of an advisory council is another way to actively involve former board members. Councils that focus on fund-raising, outreach, or general public relations are excellent new ways for retired, but still dynamic, trustees to participate. Former members who are not able to devote as much time as they previously did to service, but who still desire to be part of the organization, may find advisory councils a perfect opportunity. The nonprofit can rely on their inside knowledge and organizational memory.

## **Committee Membership**

Committee membership Inviting a departing board member to continue service on a committee is another way to keep a valued contact active. The invitation itself is a clear indication of appreciation of the trustee's past contribution. A new status gives him or her a chance to focus on a specific interest without all the other obligations that come with full board membership. It is a practical way to extend affiliation past the official term limit without the previous.