

Advocacy is a top 10 basic responsibility of a board according to BoardSource, a national organization with more than 35 years of expertise in nonprofit boards. The board is a vital relationship builder and champion for the opera company. Each board member brings a powerful network of contacts to their board service, and as the network around an organization expands, so do the opportunities for financial support, audience development, and community partnerships.

BOARD MEMBERS TAKE ACTION!

- Understand the way that public policy impacts your organization's programs and constituents and your ability to fulfill your mission.
- Monitor public policy proposals at the local, state, and federal levels that could advance (or harm) your mission.
- Identify key individuals within government who should be systematically and strategically kept informed about your organization's good work and effectiveness, on a personal basis, by those board members most appropriate to take the lead by reason of their personality, high standing in the community, or career position.
- Connect with coalitions of other organizations with similar missions and values to combine energy through joint strategy and effort.
- Invite potentially influential colleagues from supporting entities into the organization to witness for themselves how government support has made a difference

(SOURCE: *Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards*, published by BoardSource)

“Boards and their members should be conscientious ambassadors and advocates for their organizations. They should ‘stand for their mission’ by communicating and connecting with community leaders and others who are in positions to make decisions that could positively — or negatively — impact their organization’s work.”

— **BOARDSOURCE**

ADVOCACY COMMITTEES

An advocacy committee is an effective way to engage and support board members in their advocacy. By creating an advocacy committee, board members with an interest in government relations can join together, implement action steps, share advocacy intel, and support the organization's staff.

- TIP #1:** When creating an advocacy committee, consider including staff from the community programs, fundraising, box office, and other external-facing departments. These staff members are also tapping into powerful networks within the community, and all together, the board members and staff can be most effective.
- TIP #2:** The committee should identify goals, which are reviewed and supported by the general director and board chair, that may include advocacy for increased government support for the arts, expanding the opera company's network with policymakers, attending a certain number of events to champion the opera company's mission, helping to secure meetings with local policymakers, and more.
- TIP #3:** The committee should educate itself on the regulations around advocacy, lobbying, and electioneering as a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization; local legislative timelines; data to support advocacy case-making; and government structures.
- TIP #4:** Advocacy committees can consist of trustees, non-trustees who are political or PR experts, and staff.

TIP #5: Every organization is different, and therefore, there is not one recipe for an advocacy committee that will fit all organizations. Each opera company should consider how they establish committees within their organization, who should be on the committee, and what the committee's purpose will be, before getting to work.

TIP #6: Finally, some opera companies may find it better to have a non-board committee to conduct advocacy. The thinking here is that if the committee consists of champions of the organization who are not legally tied to the organization, it will remove the committee of liability concerns.

ASSESS YOUR BOARD'S COMMITMENT TO ADVOCACY

1. Have we had a discussion at a board meeting recently about how we can enhance the effectiveness of our collective advocacy as an organization — as a board of directors?
2. Can we say with conviction that our board's culture makes personal advocacy of our mission and purposes an important expectation of board service?
3. Do we make time for discussion of our systematic advocacy strategies at board meetings, including the need to stay in touch with our funders about how their investments are serving the public good?
4. Are we monitoring public policy proposals in state or federal government circles that we should support, or be concerned about, perhaps with sister organizations that have similar missions?
5. Does the staff periodically ask or encourage us to identify individuals or organizations where we have influence to advocate for our enterprise?
6. What is the record of our board members in taking initiative as advocates or ambassadors to advance our organization and its mission?
7. Who speaks for our organization? On what kinds of matters?
8. Do we have a communication plan for our organization?
9. What practices do we have in place to ensure that both the board and its members are attuned to the needs of our stakeholders?

SOURCE: Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards, published by BoardSource

FOR MORE RESOURCES ON BOARDS AND ADVOCACY, VISIT:

Stand for Your Mission's Resources:

standforyourmission.org/resources/

BoardSource

boardsource.org

"Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards" by Richard Ingram, published by BoardSource

boardsource.org/product/ten-basic-responsibilities-nonprofit-boards/