What do boards do?

All organisations, and the boards that govern them, are different. They are different sizes, have different missions, do different work, work with different people, etc. But there are certain basic tasks most boards need to undertake if they wish to be successful.

Safeguarding the mission and vision

The board is the guardian of the community group's mission and vision – i.e. what it plans to achieve, where it wants to be and how it plans to get there. Its prime role is to keep the vision alive by taking a leading role in planning for the future of the group. This is an important role for boards serving groups with or without staff, although it works best in the former case; removed from the day-to-day concerns of the staff, the board is ideally placed to stand back and take a detached view of potential future directions.

Strategic planning

Strategic planning enables groups to think through and document what they are doing, and for whom, and why they are doing it. The process encourages examination of established directions and strategies for contemporary relevance and results. This is a key board responsibility.

Further information about strategic planning is contained in the Strategic planning overview help sheet.

Legal and financial accountability

The board is responsible for ensuring the community group meets its legal requirements and remains accountable to donors and other stakeholders. Some of these responsibilities include:

- Ensuring the group acts according to its stated mission and for the purpose for which it receives any tax exemptions.
- Ensuring the group conforms to all state and territory laws.
- Finalising and approving the group's annual budget.
- Ensuring auditing requirements are fulfilled.
- Managing risk.

Further information about board members' legal and financial responsibilities is contained in the Overview of your legal responsibilities and Overview of your financial obligations help sheets.

Selecting and overseeing the CEO

Groups with paid staff will need a "head person" (usually called a Chief Executive Officer or CEO) to manage the group's day-to-day activities. The board is responsible for appointing the best or most appropriate head person for the job. Once the CEO is in place, the board must also monitor his or her performance.

Further information about this role is contained in the Board-Staff-Volunteers section of the resource centre.

Fundraising

The board must ensure that the group has adequate resources to achieve its program objectives – and, on a more basic level, that it can pay its bills. This could include:

- Helping staff to identify potential philanthropic, government or corporate grants or sponsors.
- Providing input into fundraising plans.
- Chairing or being a member of the fundraising committee.
- Cultivating new prospects for staff to follow-up.
- Accompanying staff on key visits to funders.
- Helping with expressions of thanks when appropriate.
- Organising fundraising events.
- Making personal contributions.

- Laying the groundwork with heads of government, philanthropic foundations and corporations for further support from these sectors.

Further information about fundraising is contained in the [Mounting a fundraising strategy](#) help sheet and the Our Community [Funding Centre](#).

Advocacy

The board is the primary link between the community group and everyone else. It should represent the interests of the group to the broader community and filter the diversity of stakeholder views back into the group. These two facets of the board's advocacy role include:

- **Advocating to the community** – carrying the group's message to the community, with the goal of building public awareness and reaching new and broader audiences.
- **Advocating for the community** – carrying the voice of the community to the group.

Board meetings

All boards must hold meetings, and must do so as often as the community group's constitution dictates. The conduct of meetings is one of the most important issues the board has to face and we have therefore devoted an entire section of our help sheets to this topic. Go to the [Board business](#) section of the resource centre for more information.

Evaluating its own effectiveness

A board needs to regularly evaluate itself to ensure it remains representative, responsive and effective. Evaluation might be carried out informally or could involve holding a board retreat or setting up a sub-committee specifically for this purpose.

More information about board self-evaluation is contained in the [Better boards](#) section of the resource centre.