BUILDING TRUST
With The Board

Board Governance is a collaborative effort. A productive collaboration relies on trust among team members and building this trust is critical to the board's ultimate success. Board members — as team members — must be able to rely on each other openly and without reservation. The chair, individual board members, and the board as a body must develop a trusting relationship with each other and with the chief executive to consolidate mutual efforts and objectives. In short, when trust is present, everyone is driven by a common goal and shares information openly, accepting positive interdependence.

GIVE AND TAKE
Honesty, respect, caring, integrity, and accountability: These are all elements closely tied to trust. In a group setting, members depend on each other; their individual and collective performance is based on reliability. Each member is committed to contributing to the common goal while entitled to expect the same from others. Trust is a two-way street — give and take must be on equal footing.

BUILDING TRUST IN THE BOARDROOM
A board is not a static entity — members come and go. Term limits continually test group dynamics. Under these circumstances, a board has a challenge to create a culture of trust and loyalty that survives the flux of membership. New members need to be incorporated in the team from the first meeting on. This may mean their taking an active approach to board participation in order to become fully integrated. By accepting assignments and following through, new members build their own reputation as a trustworthy peer.

This culture of trust is present when board members feel free to debate, question, openly examine, and even argue with each other's points of view without turning the discussion into — or perceiving it as — a personal attack. Differing opinions should be a welcomed tool to get to the heart of the matter under consideration. Respect for each other's contributions is the true foundation for professional reliance and interdependence.

Trust in the boardroom also assumes that appropriate confidential issues remain classified. Without that basic principle, the reputation of the organization may be endangered, openness of deliberation may be compromised, and individual board members may worry about what not to say rather than participate in a free exchange of ideas.

BOARD AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: BUILDING AND MAINTAINING TRUST
The board and the chief executive are connected by the need to support each other in their respective roles. Board decisions are deficient without the inside professional perspective that the staff leader provides. The board must be able to trust that information it receives is timely, accurate, unfiltered, and includes all the elements that allow it to make educated and wise decisions. The board has the fiduciary duty to oversee the activities in the organization. In that capacity, it needs a healthy dose of constructive skepticism that is reasonably balanced with trust in the integrity and competence of the chief executive to avoid intrusiveness and micromanagement.

The chief executive needs to feel empowered and trusted as he or she engages in accomplishing the mutually accepted goals without the board needing to second guess management actions. Equally, the chief executive must be able to count on the board's support with confidence. He or she must be able to go to the board for guidance,

direction, or protection if a situation so demands without losing face. Unhindered communication builds trust between the board and the chief executive, and that trust must be earned.

TRUST IN THE ORGANIZATION

Every tax-exempt organization must earn the trust of its constituents. The board has the responsibility to ensure that the donors, customers and clients, staff, and any other stakeholders — including the general public — can feel confident that the organization is focused on its mission, is efficient in allocating its funds, and is able to show that it makes a difference for the public good. The board must ensure that reporting is guided by appropriate transparency and that all the necessary processes and procedures are employed to achieve this: making the Form 990 easily available, sharing financial statements, projecting the organization truthfully in its materials and brochures and so forth.

MECHANISMS FOR BUILDING TRUST

As the board incorporates trust in its role as the organization's representative, in its own methods of operating and in its relationship with the chief executive, it should keep the following in mind:

- Disclosing and making access easy to organizational documents describing financial and programmatic achievements are essential to gaining the public's trust.
- Transparency of processes for appointments for board positions and hiring the chief executive eliminate concerns about unfair treatment or discrimination.
- Incorporating a culture of positive dissent in the boardroom encourages board members to share opinions and accept counter-comments without turning issues into personal conflicts.
- Regularity of executive sessions removes secrecy from these meetings that allow board members to openly and in confidence discuss internal issues without staff present.
- Regular KPAWN (what Keeps the President AWake at Night) meetings provide a safe, trusting environment for the chief executive to share personal and position-related challenges with the board.
- Annual chief executive performance evaluations allow for honest feedback and assessment of achievements under fair conditions if they are based on mutually agreed upon goals.
- Board self-assessment builds trust and confidence among board members as a collective effort to judge how the team is working together.