



WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Board of Directors Service 101

A single interactive session for new and serving board members

ONE SESSION

90 MINUTES

VIRTUAL

INTERACTIVE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Know the Role. Know the Duty. Know Your Why.

“Most board dysfunction is not bad people. It is good people who were never told what the job actually is.”

Most people join a nonprofit board because someone they respect asked them. Very few are ever told what the role requires, where it ends, or what they are legally responsible for. They learn by watching, which means they learn whatever habits the board already has.

This session fixes that in 90 minutes. It is built around doing rather than listening: participants sort real decisions, score their own board against the skills it needs, read a live financial statement, and leave having written down why they serve.

Who it is for

- New board members in their first year
- Serving members who were never formally onboarded
- Board chairs and governance committees
- Executive directors who work with a board

What makes it interactive

- Live sorting exercise: board call or staff call?
- Board skills matrix, rolled up and read in the room
- Anonymous board self-assessment, scored live
- A real financial statement, read together
- Written “why” statement each member keeps

THE THREE QUESTIONS

What is my role? · What am I responsible for? · Why am I here?

SINGLE SESSION · FOUNDATION

01

Roles, Responsibilities, and Your Why

Understanding the job before trying to do it

90

minutes

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- 01 Distinguish what the board decides from what staff decide
- 02 Describe the duties of care, loyalty, and obedience in practical terms
- 03 Read a nonprofit financial statement well enough to ask a useful question
- 04 Name the questions a board should be asking at every meeting
- 05 Identify where this board's skills are thin, and what to recruit for next
- 06 Articulate why you serve, and what you specifically contribute

What We Cover

- Governance versus management, and why most friction is an unwritten role agreement
- The three fiduciary duties, and what breaching each one actually looks like
- Reading the statement of activities and the statement of financial position
- Oversight of the board's one employee, and conflict of interest in practice
- The board skills matrix: what this board has, and what it is missing
- Meeting discipline: agendas built around oversight rather than updates

How Participants Engage

- Opening round: one line on why you joined this board
- Sorting exercise: fourteen real decisions, board call or staff call
- Anonymous board self-assessment scored and discussed live
- Walk-through of a real nonprofit financial statement
- Board skills matrix completed in advance, gaps read out in the room
- Written why statement each member keeps

KEY TAKEAWAY A board member who knows the role, the duty, and their own reason for serving asks better questions.

Recruit for what you are missing

Most boards recruit from the networks of the people already sitting on them, which quietly reproduces the skills already in the room. A skills gap analysis replaces that instinct with evidence: what this board needs, who actually has it, and where the bench is thin enough to be a risk.

The matrix is completed before the session, in about ten minutes per member. Part four of the workshop reads the result out loud, and the board leaves with recruitment priorities it can defend to anyone who asks why.

How it works

01 Define what this board needs

Eighteen competencies across governance, finance, resources, programs, and operations, each marked essential, desirable, or not required.

02 Each member rates themselves

A four-point scale, from no exposure through to able to lead. Completed privately in about ten minutes, before the session.

03 Roll the ratings up

One grid places every competency against every member, and shows the depth the board actually has in each.

04 Classify and decide

Each essential competency lands in one of four states, which sets the recruitment priorities and the development plan.

How the gaps are read

CRITICAL GAP	Essential to the mission, and no one on the board has working knowledge of it.	Recruit for this first.
SINGLE POINT	One member carries it alone. The capability leaves the day that member rotates off.	Recruit a second, or develop one.
ADEQUATE DEPTH	Two or more members can hold a real conversation about it and challenge an answer.	Hold it, and protect it through turnover.
CONCENTRATED	More than half the board shares one strength, which usually means one recruiting network.	Widen where you look for members.

THE RESOURCE YOU RECEIVE

Board Skills Matrix and Gap Analysis Worksheet

- Part A: individual self-assessment, one page per member
- Part B: the board-wide roll-up grid, every competency against every seat
- Part C: gap classification and ranked recruitment priorities
- Part D: composition and representation snapshot

Supplied as a printable PDF and an Excel workbook that scores itself.

HOW THE SESSION RUNS

Ninety minutes, built around doing

Instruction is kept short and immediately tested. Every segment ends with participants having produced something rather than heard something.

OPENING

10 min

Why did you say yes?

Each participant answers in one line. Responses are collected live and read back, surfacing the range of reasons people serve and the expectations nobody stated.

PART ONE

20 min

The role: governance, not management

What a board owns and what staff own. The boundary is drawn, then immediately tested in a sorting exercise using fourteen real decisions.

PART TWO

20 min

The duty: care, loyalty, and obedience

The three fiduciary duties in plain language, what each looks like in a meeting, and the financial oversight that follows from them. Includes reading an actual statement together.

PART THREE

15 min

The questions a board should ask

The handful of questions that distinguish oversight from operational drift, practised against a scenario where the answer is genuinely unclear.

PART FOUR

15 min

The skills gap: what this board is missing

The skills matrix completed before the session is rolled up and read out. The board sees its own depth by competency and leaves with ranked recruitment priorities.

CLOSING

10 min

Your why, written down

Each member writes what they bring, what they will ask about, and why they serve. They keep it; the chair gets an anonymous summary.

What participants take away

A written role agreement to take to the chair, a completed board self-assessment, the board's own skills matrix with ranked recruitment priorities, a question set for the next meeting, and their own why statement. Materials are provided in editable form so the board can reuse them when the next member joins.