

BALANCING DEMOCRACY AND EFFECTIVENESS IN ASSOCIATION GOVERNANCE

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ORGANISATION'S APPROACH TO BUILDING A BOARD? IS THERE AN EMPHASIS ON GETTING THE BEST AND MOST QUALIFIED PEOPLE FOR THE BOARD, OR DOES THE ORGANISATION ATTEMPT TO MAKE ELECTION TO THE BOARD AS OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL MEMBERS AS POSSIBLE? **TEXT WAYNE AMUNDSON, PRESIDENT OF ASSOCIATION XPERTISE**

The historical approach in many organisations is the latter, and this may be reflected in nomination and election processes that include nominations from the floor at AGMs, some reluctance to present a slate of candidates for consideration, and elections that occur at the AGM. The increasingly common approach in other organisations is to identify potential Board candidates who have the skills, stature, and experience the organisation considers essential for good director performance.

When the emphasis is on building the best and most effective Board possible, associations are well-advised to focus efforts on ensuring Board connection with and accountability to the membership. It is also very important to place greater emphasis on the process of seeking out those qualified candidates for the Board. More effort is required to ensure that the search for such candidates is not limited to specific geographic areas, specific membership groups, or insiders only. These Boards must work at bringing a democratic element to their role and function.

With organisations seeking to maintain a significant democratic emphasis, there is a critical need to ensure that the Board is trained and oriented on its role, and has resources available to secure advice and knowledge as needed. These directors may be all over the map with respect to their knowledge and understanding of governance, and this can result in frustra-



Members of today generally are looking for more transparency and accountability in an efficient and effective organisation

tion, friction and poor decision-making. Good intentions are not enough... governing associations is growing increasingly complex.

Which end of the spectrum is best? Well, a lot depends on the culture of the organisation, but it is probably a good idea to bring your approach more to the centre. For example, if your organization still has nominations from the floor of the AGM, then look for more efficient ways to achieve democratic involvement in the election process. By the same token, if your approach is building an efficient and effective Board, then make sure everyone remembers that no matter how impressive the Board, members and their opinions still matter!

Members of today generally are looking for more transparency and accountability in an efficient and effective organisation. To achieve this, both modern democratic principles and effective governance principles are essential.



Wayne Amundson is president of Association Xpertise Inc., a consulting firm serving associations and non-profits. He is also a writer and speaker on association and non-profit management and governance, and is editor of *The Canadian Association e-zine* and

co-author of the new *Primer for Directors of Not-for-Profit Corporations* published by the Industry Canada and three non-profit umbrella groups in Canada. www.axi.ca