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**THE NONPROFIT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S
WORK-WITH-YOUR-BOARD**

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Our Love Letter to Executive Directors Everywhere

Dear Executive Director,

You're amazing! And we don't say that lightly. You're at the helm of an awesome nonprofit, supporting staff, ensuring strategic plans are operationalized, raising money, and so much more. It's a lot of work, and you do it fabulously!

Funraise knows one of the toughest parts of your job can be working with your Board of Directors. And frankly, we're surprised to see a lot of advice out there to help board members work with Executive Directors. But where's the advice to help you, the fantastic ED, work with your board?

The reality is, as the top leadership employee, working with the board is your responsibility. If you want a

high-functioning, awesome board, you need to give your board direction, encouragement, support, and accountability. And to help you achieve your dream board, we've put together this workbook.

The Nonprofit Executive Director's Work-with-your-board Workbook is your best way to transform your board and your relationship with them. We've distilled the best expert advice and best practices from former March-of-Dimes-ED-turned-nonprofit-consultant Erin Chidsey, as well as BoardSource and even more references so you don't have to spend hours researching, banging your head against a wall, and crying into a pint of Ben and Jerry's.

As BoardSource shared in its report *Leading with Intent: 2017 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices*, “Chief executives and board chairs agree the board has an impact on organizational performance, and two particular board characteristics matter most: the board’s understanding of its roles and responsibilities, and the board’s ability to work as a collaborative team toward

shared goals.”¹ We know you can coach your board to be their best and in turn help your organization be at its best. This guide will give you practical advice to bring the dream to life.

ED, Funraise has your back, and we’re here to help you succeed. Let’s get started!

High fives,

Your friends at Funraise



Let’s build a better board!



REALITY CHECK:

What's Really Going on with Your Board



LET'S IMAGINE A SCENARIO, SHALL WE?

You've just wrapped up a meeting with your board. All of the board members attended and had read the materials you sent them ahead of time. They asked thoughtful, strategic questions about projects the organization is working on. They helped you solve a problem you've been having with a manager, and they appreciated and welcomed your open communication. You respect and appreciate your board members, and you know the feeling is mutual. You and your board chair have worked hard together to cultivate this kind of board, and after a meeting like that, you're so glad you did.

Does this scenario sound like something out of a daydream to you? Stick with us; we'll get there.

Trust, respect, honesty, and open communication are the foundation of a healthy partnership between an Executive Director and the Board of Directors. And yet for so many Executive Directors, their reality is a far cry from this fantasy.

Building this kind of healthy partnership can feel like swapping out that daily coffee

(or five) for something way less appealing but way better for you; green juice anyone? Many Executive Directors and boards are challenged by lack of clarity and communication, change, and different leadership styles. And all of this is compounded by the fact that you don't see your board members every weekday to build a great working relationship. Your interactions are limited to board meetings, conference calls, and emails—no wonder forming a team is so tough!

Chin up, friend! Don't go closing this workbook out of despair.

Funraise believes it's possible to have a great partnership with your board; in fact, we're kickass-board champions. The strength and function of your board is an essential factor in your organization's ability to grow and we want your organization to be all-caps AMAAAAZING.

Your journey to an awesome board starts with understanding your current board and the state of your relationship with it. Take a few minutes to do the self-assessment we've included on the next page.

Self-Assessment: The Current State of Your Board

Rate the following questions on a scale of True to False, with “()” falling somewhere in-between.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: THE CURRENT STATE OF YOUR BOARD	RATING TRUE ← → FALSE
I understand the different types of personalities and leadership styles of board members.	TRUE “()” FALSE
My board members are clear on their roles and responsibilities.	TRUE “()” FALSE
Our board has an accountability system in place to support board members in carrying out their responsibilities.	TRUE “()” FALSE
When board members are given a project or task, I am confident in their ability to follow through and meet a deadline.	TRUE “()” FALSE
I am comfortable asking board members for support with a challenge I’m facing.	TRUE “()” FALSE
My board chair and I have great rapport and a stable working relationship.	TRUE “()” FALSE
I set boundaries to help board members stay “out of the weeds” of operations.	TRUE “()” FALSE

I support board members to have the tools, resources, and knowledge they need to carry out their strategic, generative, and fiduciary responsibilities.	TRUE	😊	FALSE
I'm committed to an open and honest conversation with board members.	TRUE	😊	FALSE
I view our board of directors as valuable contributors to our organization's mission and vision.	TRUE	😊	FALSE

Number of TRUE: _____ Number of 😊: _____ Number of FALSE: _____

Your Self-Assessment Outcomes

If you selected “FALSE” more than 4 times, your relationship with your board is a work in progress. Don't get frustrated or disgruntled about the state of things—you can improve them! At this stage, it's important to think about laying a strong foundation for your relationship with the board. Where can you hit the reset button? What small (or big) changes can you start to make to see results? You'll benefit the most from the “Get Started” section of this workbook.

If you selected “😊” more than 4 times, you're on your way. There are probably some aspects of your board that work great, and maybe there are some that need an overhaul. Take some time to identify the outliers on both ends of the spectrum to build your action plan. You'll likely find helpful advice in both the “Get Started” and “Take It To The Next Level” sections of this workbook.

If you selected “TRUE” more than 4 times, you're doing great! Your score is an indication that your board is functioning very well. Look for things in the relationship that have worked well and continue to leverage those strategies. Additionally, you might want to look for growth edges in your leadership and relations with the board that will continue to strengthen your working relationship. You'll find some helpful advice for optimizing your board in the “Take It To The Next Level” section of the workbook.

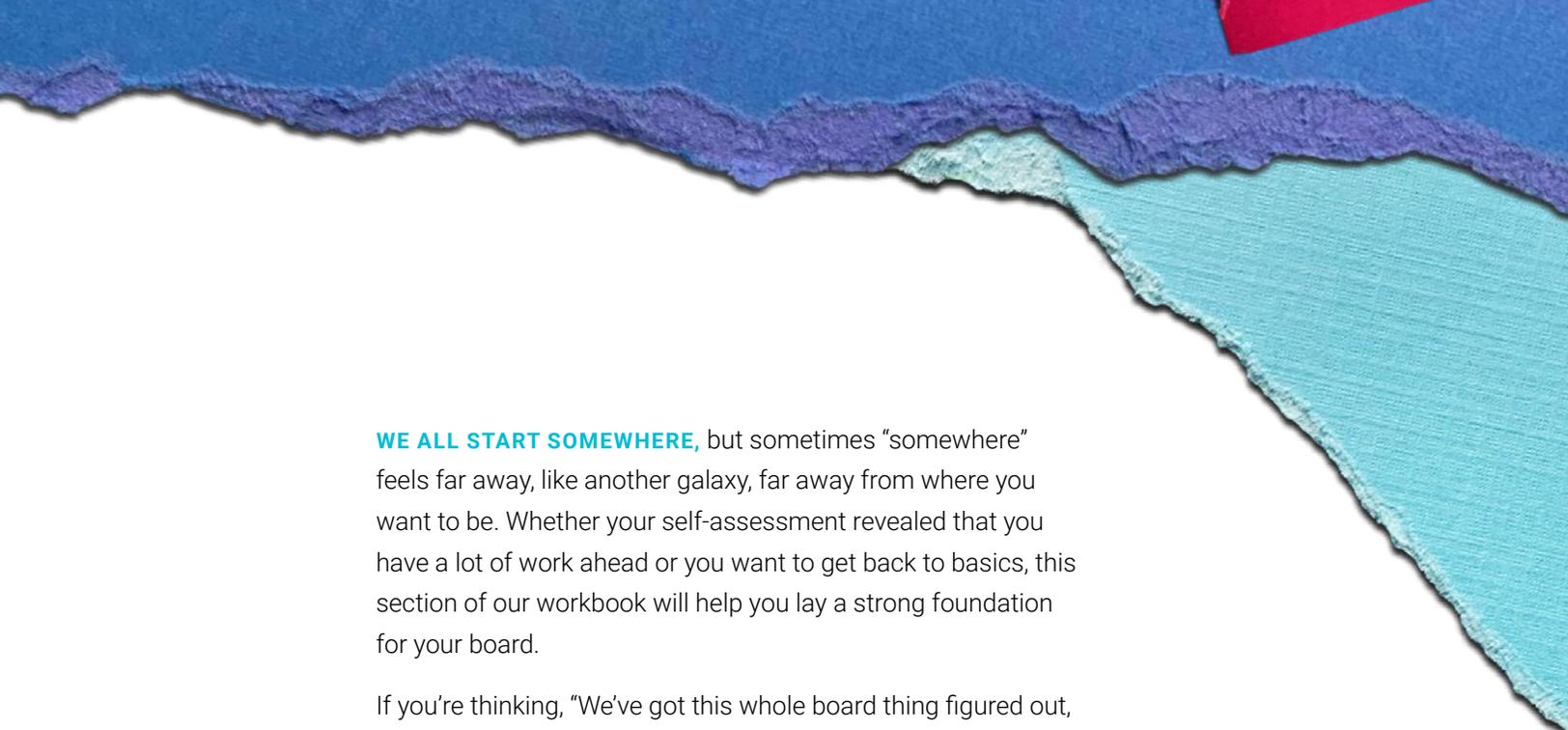
No matter what the results of the self-assessment, know you deserve a gold star for undertaking the process and doing this important work. You're committed to being the best leader you can be for your organization and your board.

Let's dive into building your roadmap to an awesome nonprofit board.



PART 1:

Get Started



WE ALL START SOMEWHERE, but sometimes “somewhere” feels far away, like another galaxy, far away from where you want to be. Whether your self-assessment revealed that you have a lot of work ahead or you want to get back to basics, this section of our workbook will help you lay a strong foundation for your board.

If you’re thinking, “We’ve got this whole board thing figured out, I’m just going to skip this section”, you should think again!

Even if you think you’ve got this whole board thing all figured out, you could benefit from a review of the basics and best practices. If nothing else, check off those mental boxes to make sure you have a rock-solid foundation in place. So, stick around.

In the “Get Started” section, we’re laying out seven foundational practices you need to have in place to build an awesome board.

PRACTICE #1:

Assess Your Current Board

You’ve already done a self-assessment as a part of this workbook, so maybe it’s no surprise we’re suggesting assessing your current board as the first foundational practice. As nonprofit guru Joan Garry says, “You might try to reenergize and re-motivate your existing board members. But getting people to change is hard. In the end, you may be best off bringing in new blood. How can you know? The first thing you need to do is figure out what you have.”²

What we suggest is assessing both your current board practices and individual board members to take a full inventory of your starting point.

ASSESSMENT: CURRENT BOARD PRACTICES	RATING			NOTES
	TRUE	←————→	FALSE	
The board has at least the minimum number of members as required by the by-laws	TRUE	~\(\(\Psi\)\)/~	FALSE	
The board has a Board Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer	TRUE	~\(\(\Psi\)\)/~	FALSE	
There are clear job descriptions for all roles on the board, including members at large	TRUE	~\(\(\Psi\)\)/~	FALSE	
Board members understand their role as defined by the job description	TRUE	~\(\(\Psi\)\)/~	FALSE	
The board has regularly scheduled meetings	TRUE	~\(\(\Psi\)\)/~	FALSE	
There is at least 75% attendance at every board meeting	TRUE	~\(\(\Psi\)\)/~	FALSE	
Every board member makes an annual gift at a level that is personally meaningful for them	TRUE	~\(\(\Psi\)\)/~	FALSE	
Board members participate in an annual self-assessment	TRUE	~\(\(\Psi\)\)/~	FALSE	

Board meetings are productive and strategic	TRUE	😊	FALSE
Board members are engaged and actively participate in initiatives and projects when asked	TRUE	😊	FALSE

NOW THAT YOU'VE FINISHED THE BOARD ASSESSMENT, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE RESULTS?

No matter how what your board scored on the assessment, you should know that developing an effective board is almost always a permanent work in progress. In fact, according to a McKinsey survey of executives and directors of nonprofit social-service organizations, only 17% of the respondents felt that their boards were as effective as possible. In other words—almost everyone is in the same boat.³

If you were to name three areas for improvement—anything you can think of—what would they be?

Now that you've assessed the board as a whole, you may want to take it a step further and do an assessment of each individual board member. One assessment tool we recommend is [Joan Garry's Board Assessment Tool](#).⁴ It's a great way to take inventory of each board member and their level of participation.

PRACTICE #2
Get Clear on Board Members' Roles and Responsibilities

Ever tried to make progress on a task when you had no idea what the end goal even was? Bring on the Advil for a major headache! Unfortunately, this is precisely how your board members feel when they aren't clear on their roles and responsibilities. You'll need a Costco sized bottle of Advil because not only is it a headache for them, it's a headache for you.

Fortunately, there's a preventative measure. No Advil required.

Enter: the Nonprofit Board Member Job Description.

Having a clear job description for board members solves one of the key problems we talked about earlier in this workbook—lack of clarity. Not only does this provide board members with clarity about their role, but it’s also a valuable tool to help you recruit the right people and set expectations moving forward. As [nonprofit board expert Erin Chidsey](#) says, “Every board member should be brought on with the same expectations.”⁵

LET’S CREATE YOUR RADICAL BOARD MEMBER JOB DESCRIPTION.

<p>Board Member Job Description for:</p>	<p>Qualifications</p>
<p>About Our Organization: _____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Board members of our organization are passionate about the mission and vision. They offer their expertise, talent, and time to support it. Here are the qualifications we look for in new board members.</p>
<p>Role of the Board of Directors</p> <p>Playing a top leadership role for our organization, the Board of Directors provides strategic, generative, and fiduciary oversight. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • determining the mission and purposes of the organization • selecting and evaluating the performance of the CEO • strategic and organizational planning • ensuring strong fiduciary oversight and financial management • fundraising and resource development • approving and monitoring the organization’s programs and services • enhancing the organization’s public image • assessing the organization’s performance as its governing body <p>(Include additional bullet points as you see fit)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

PRACTICE #3

Intentionally Recruit Board Members

Have you had a board vacancy you ended up giving to the first person who said they were interested? Real talk, this is Board Recruitment Roulette. It could work out... maybe. But for a lot of organizations and boards, this approach does not work out and contributes to a cycle of board dysfunction. William F. Meehan III, Lafayette Partners Lecturer for 2013-2015 in Strategic Management at Stanford Graduate School of Business, shares the antidote to this dysfunction, "Nonprofit organizations need to do a better job attracting board members with substantive, relevant experience who will deeply and personally embrace the mission of the organization."⁷

As the most senior employee, it's up to you to champion best practices for board recruitment. Now that you've got a board member job description in place, you're on the right track. Leverage your network and those of your board members to look for that next perfect member. Advertise the open position with the job description you've created so prospective board members understand what they're signing up for.

If you have a recruitment committee, you can work with the committee to make sure there are ongoing best practices so you know 100% that you've got great talent waiting in the wings.

Part of your recruitment strategy should be diversity and inclusion. One of the more alarming findings from BoardSource's Leading with Intent report was the 27% of all organizations who responded to the survey saying they have 0 people of color on their board. Seriously, getting a variety of perspectives on your board shouldn't be an afterthought as you recruit.

"15% of board members are 64 years+, 43% are 50 to 63 years old, 28% are 40 to 49, and 12% are 30 to 39."⁸

PRACTICE #4

Build a Relationship with Your Board Chair

Check-in time! How's the relationship with your board chair?

It's one of the most critical leadership relationships within an organization, and yet, very few Executive Directors intentionally build or cultivate their relationship with their Board Chair. Strengthening this essential bond is often the best change Executive Directors can make to have a high-functioning relationship with their board, making an awesome board.

To start, you should have a standing meeting with your board chair, weekly or biweekly. The idea is to be in regular communication about things that matter so there are #nosurprises and so you can support each other.

Here are some agenda items you may want to include in your standing meeting:

- **Highlights and news from around the organization. The board chair can also give you an update on happenings with the board. Remember to keep it high-level.**
- **Finances**
- **Fundraising**
- **Upcoming projects or initiatives**
- **Planning the next board meeting agenda**
- **Next steps and accountability. Decide what the action items are, who's responsible for them, and when they'll be completed.**

Ready to start your meetings? Here's an email you can send to your Board Chair to get the ball rolling.

Hi (Awesome Board Chair's Name),

I've been doing some research regarding nonprofit boards to find new ways to support our board's success.

I'd like to propose a change that will help support communication and collaboration between the two of us: let's set a regular weekly or biweekly time for you and me to meet. The purpose of this meeting will be for us to stay on track in discussing high-level matters within the organization.

I see this as an excellent opportunity for us to strengthen our working relationship as we continue to work towards our organization's mission.

Let me know what you think,

(Your name)

Send that email and treat yo' self! It's a big step.

“15% of board members are 64 years+, 43% are 50 to 63 years old, 28% are 40 to 49, and 12% are 30 to 39.”⁸



PRACTICE #5

Get Your Board Members Out of the Weeds

Grab your gardening gloves and weed killer; you're clearing the way to an awesome nonprofit board, and you need to make sure that path is weed-free. In other words, steer your board members clear of tedious details (i.e., napkin color for a special event). The day-to-day minutiae of running your nonprofit isn't a good use of board members' time, nor is it part of their role.

Introducing a new and improved job description is one way to set expectations, but you and your board chair may need to have a plan to continue guiding board members down a weed-free path. You may need to have a word or phrase to redirect the conversation and indicate to one another you need to shift gears. This could also be a friendly reminder during meetings to stick to this new habit you're trying to instill within the board.

PRACTICE #6

Plan Better Board Meetings

We know you've been there. It's the middle of a board meeting and you glance around the table at your board members only to notice a lot of glazed-over eyes and people checked out of the conversation. It's frustrating because this is your monthly opportunity to talk with them, engage them in a discussion, and encourage their participation.

Do you want to know why most board members aren't engaged during meetings? The meetings are boring and not designed to encourage participation. It's up to you and your board chair to plan better meetings. According to McKinsey, "leading nonprofits find it vital to plan—by setting dates for board and committee meetings early, arranging agendas to ensure pressing matters will be discussed fully, and giving staff members enough lead time to develop reading lists for directors well in advance of meetings."³

Setting a routine for meetings is also helpful—make every meeting setup as similar as possible, and do it often. Monthly meetings are a good pace; quarterly is too infrequent and weekly or bi-weekly will be a drain on your board.

The cardinal mistake in most board meetings is that they're information dumps. Your board is hearing you talk at them rather than feeling like you're talking to them. When you prioritize providing opportunities to engage, discuss, and contribute, you supercharge your kickass board.

Your first step away from information dump meetings is to create a board report that your board members can read ahead of time. You can also use a consent agenda to expedite any informational updates at the meetings. During board meetings, your chair can ask, "Are there any items in this report anyone feels need board discussion? If not, can I have a motion to accept the report?"

Of course, the onus isn't just on you and your board chair. You can and should set expectations with your board members that they need to do their homework before meetings and show up ready to engage.

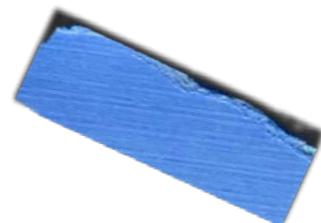
PRACTICE #7

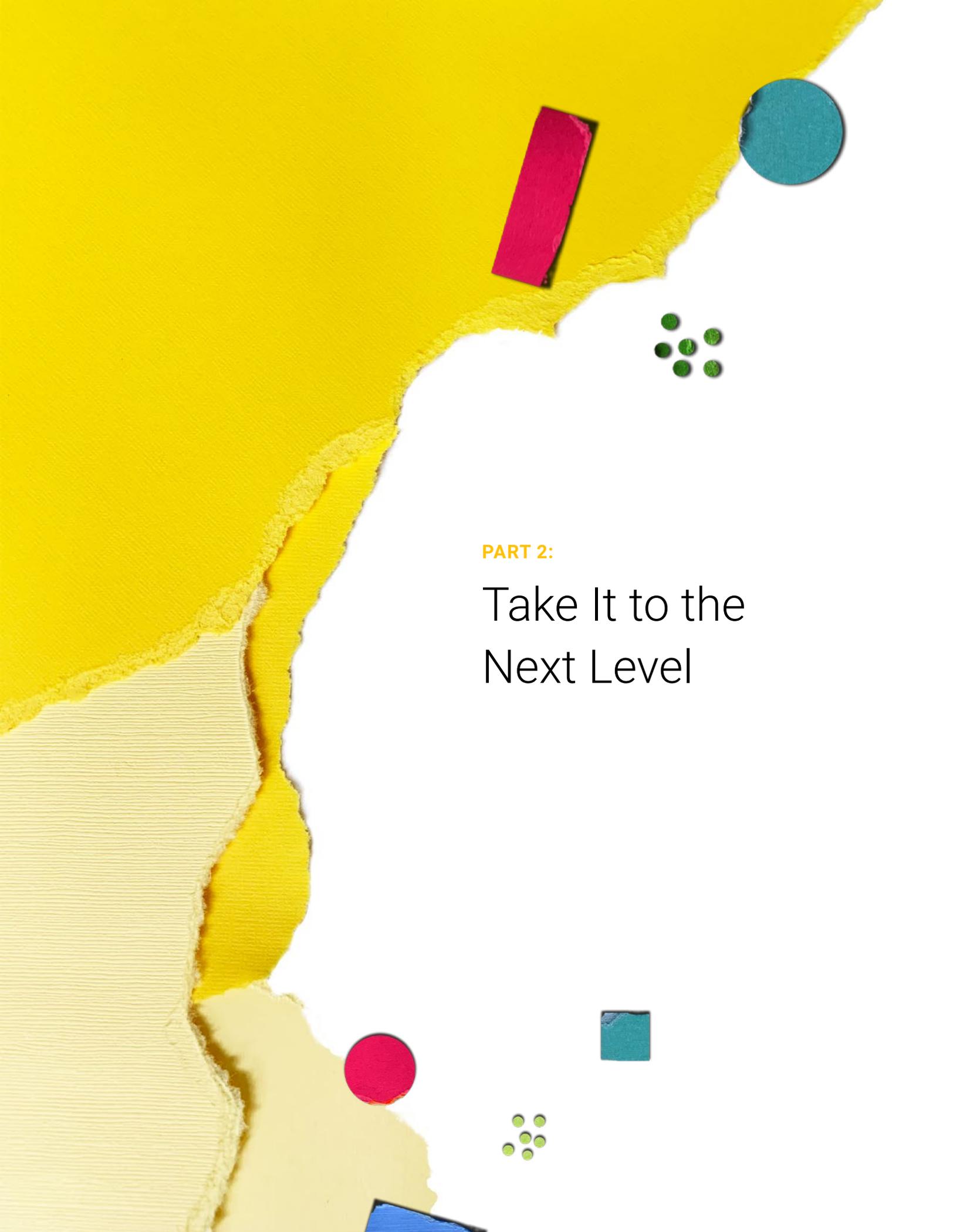
Implement Annual Self-Assessments for Board Members

Annual self-assessments are a foundational best practice for every nonprofit board. Not only do they give board members an opportunity for reflection and accountability for their contributions, but they also open the door for honest conversation between you, your board chair, and board members. Unfortunately, the 2015 Survey on Board of Directors of Nonprofit Organizations found 36% of nonprofit boards don't evaluate their own performance.⁹

Start by agreeing to an annual time frame for the self-assessment. The last month of your fiscal year might be a natural time for these conversations. Then, work with your board chair to update board members about this practice. Give them context as to why this is a practice your board should undertake and help them understand what's involved.

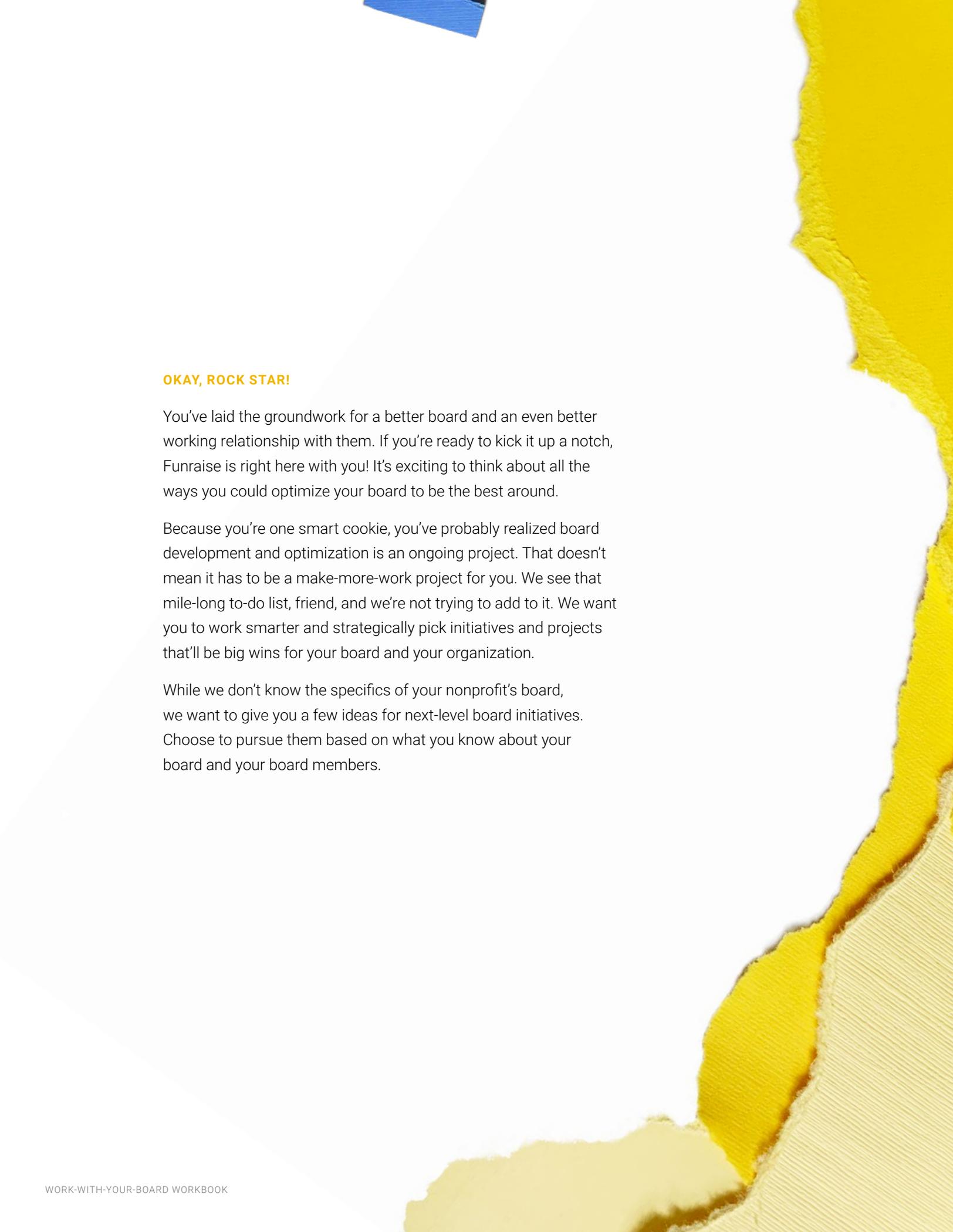
Your next task is to work with your board to design the self-assessment; your board chair may want to take a leadership role on this. The self-assessment should be based on the job description you've created for board members as these are the clear expectations you have for them.





PART 2:

Take It to the Next Level



OKAY, ROCK STAR!

You've laid the groundwork for a better board and an even better working relationship with them. If you're ready to kick it up a notch, Funraise is right here with you! It's exciting to think about all the ways you could optimize your board to be the best around.

Because you're one smart cookie, you've probably realized board development and optimization is an ongoing project. That doesn't mean it has to be a make-more-work project for you. We see that mile-long to-do list, friend, and we're not trying to add to it. We want you to work smarter and strategically pick initiatives and projects that'll be big wins for your board and your organization.

While we don't know the specifics of your nonprofit's board, we want to give you a few ideas for next-level board initiatives. Choose to pursue them based on what you know about your board and your board members.

IDEA #2

Implement Monthly or Quarterly Self-Assessment Check-Ins

Are you convinced yet that you need to do board member self-assessments? We're pretty sure we heard a resounding, "YES!" You know annual self-assessments are a best practice for nonprofit boards, but here's what else you need to know—according to our resident board expert, Erin Chidsey of Southland Strategies, you can optimize your board members' performances by checking in more frequently.

You probably already have regular check-ins with your staff that help you understand what they're working on, support their performance, and provide accountability for annual work plan goals. You can use a similar approach to supporting board members.

You or your board chair can set monthly or quarterly self-assessments with board members.

Here's a sample agenda for your board member check-in meeting. Use this as a way to keep your conversation with board members focused on past performance and future goals.

1. **Celebration and reflection**

- What's one recent board contribution you're proud of?
- Overall, how has your time as a board member gone so far?

2. **Review the last self-assessment**

- What goals have you made progress toward?
- What areas do you think have improved?
- What are your growth areas?

3. **Action Steps—take a few minutes at the end of the check-in to identify the board member's action steps**

IDEA #3

Develop High Functioning Committees

When was the last time you were over-the-moon excited about a committee meeting? If you can't remember, we're willing to bet your board members aren't super excited either. And yet, committees play an essential role in board governance.

Here are the essential committees your organization should have:

- **Executive Committee**
- **Finance Committee**
- **Fundraising Committee**
- **Recruitment Committee**

If you're looking for that overachiever A+, here are a few other committees you may want to consider:

- **Governance Committee**
- **Diversity and Inclusion**

IDEA #4

Support Succession Planning

It's a sad, sad truth that board members aren't going to stick around forever. But it's also okay. Board members are not meant to be on your board forever.

No matter which board member is leaving, the process will be way less stressful when you have a succession plan in place. That goes double for the Board Chair role.

What's a succession plan? It's your working plan for identifying and developing leadership and new board members in anticipation of board members stepping down. Here are a few action items to kickstart your succession planning.

- **Always know who your next Board Chair will be. If you have a Vice Chair, it could be that person. But! Even if you do have a Vice Chair, be sure to carefully consider whether they'll be the best person for the Board Chair role.**
- **Have a plan to mentor and develop the future Board Chair. This could include you and your current Board Chair periodically meeting with the candidate to offer them mentorship and training. You could also invest in a more formal training program offered through a local or state association. The goal is to help the candidate feel ready to step into the Board Chair role when it's time.**
- **Create a pipeline of potential board members. If you have a Recruitment Committee, this would be their job. Otherwise, the board can keep a running list of potential candidates.**
- **Engage potential board members before having a vacancy. Meet with candidates to see if there's a mutual interest. You may also want to give candidates unique volunteer opportunities, like serving on a committee.**

In addition to board member succession planning, your board should also be in charge of your succession plan as it'll be their responsibility to hire a new Executive Director should you ever decide to leave. Interestingly, the 2015 Board of Directors of Nonprofit Organizations found that two thirds (69 percent) of the survey respondents didn't have a succession plan in place for the current Executive Director or CEO. Three quarters (78 percent) couldn't immediately name a successor if the current Executive Director or CEO were to leave the organization tomorrow.⁹

IDEA #5

Cultivate the Team Culture

Quick, what are three words describing the team culture of your board?

Are the words you listed words describing an ideal team culture for your board? If not, cultivating and supporting the board's team culture may be a good initiative for you to undertake.

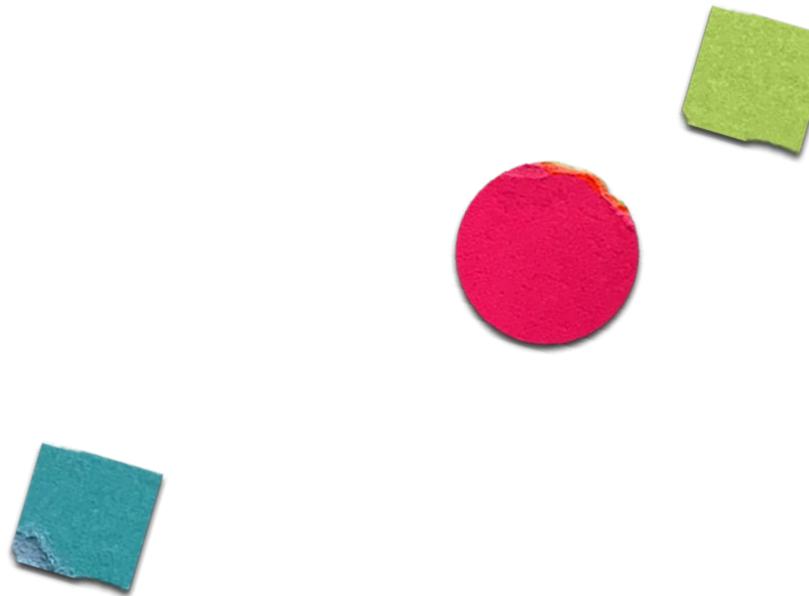
Let's face it, board members don't see each other often, yet they need to trust each other and work together in a significant leadership capacity. There are distinct personalities and leadership styles on your board. Conflicts happen. Norms are intentionally or unintentionally set. As Executive Director, you can (and should!) get the ball rolling toward a better team culture.

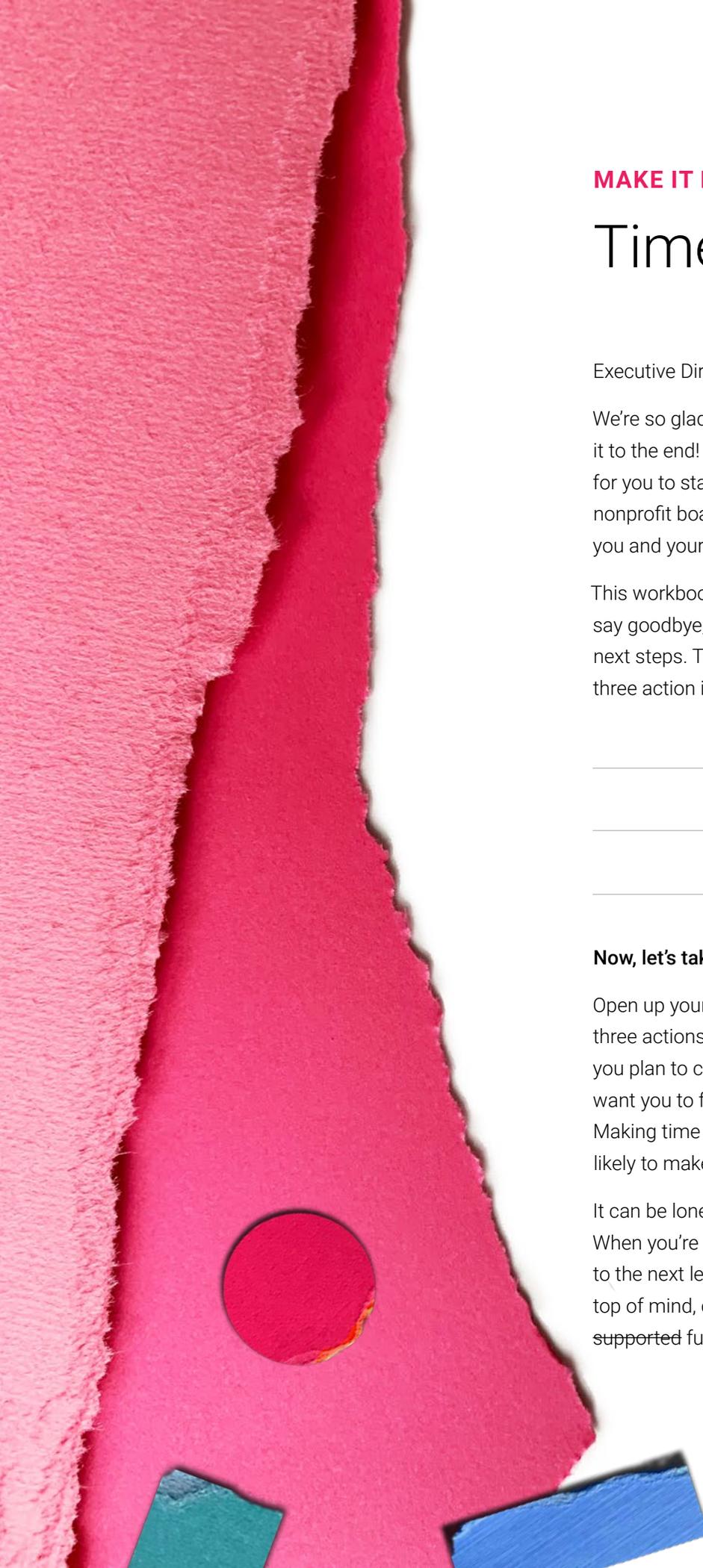
Here are a few ideas you can try out:

- **Plan an annual board retreat that includes time for fun**
- **Take 10 minutes at the beginning of your next board meeting for an icebreaker**
- **Create a team vision board for the board of directors**
- **Organize a quarterly social or happy hour for board members**

“Be a leader who sets culture and expectations for all board members, and is not afraid to propose changes when necessary.”

- THE 21ST CENTURY BOARD





MAKE IT REAL:

Time for Action

Executive Director,

We're so glad you downloaded this workbook and made it to the end! We are popping-confetti-cannons excited for you to start your journey towards an awesome nonprofit board. We know with an awesome board, you and your organization will be unstoppable.

This workbook has laid out a lot of ideas, but before we say goodbye, we want you to get crystal clear about your next steps. Take a few minutes to write down your top three action items.

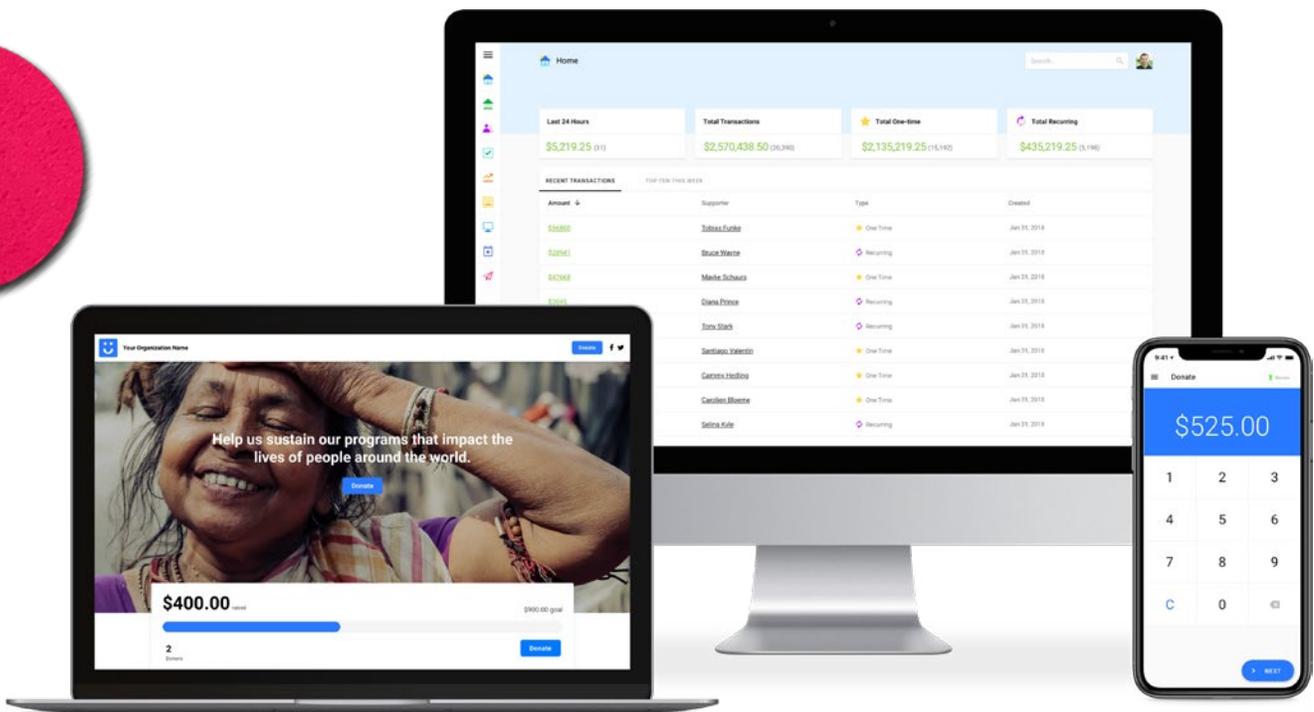
Now, let's take this a step further.

Open up your calendar and schedule time for these three actions. It doesn't have to be all at once. Maybe you plan to complete them over a month or two. We want you to follow through on your big, amazing plans. Making time in your calendar now means you're more likely to make it happen.

It can be lonely at the top, which is why we're here to help. When you're looking for tools to take your fundraising to the next level and a team who's got your success top of mind, consider Funraise. Prepare to be **amazed supported** funding awesome.

Lead your team to fundraising success.

FIND YOUR TOOLS AT [FUNRAISE.ORG](https://www.funraise.org)



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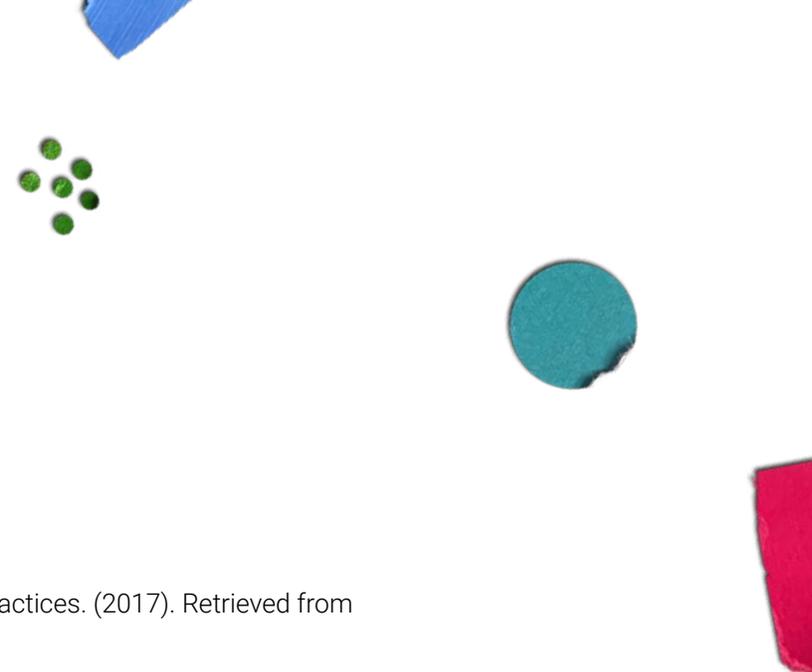
-  Giving Forms
-  Reader
-  Fundraising Websites
-  Recurring Giving
-  Events & Ticketing

TRACK

-  Donor CRM
-  Donation Management
-  Donation Analytics
-  Donation Pledges

AUTOMATE

-  Donation Tasks
-  Automated Emails
-  Wealth Screening
-  Integrations



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We're All in
This Together.

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