

# Empowering Nurses through Nonprofit Board Leadership

Editorial by Dr. Holly Sak

**HAVE YOU CONSIDERED** joining a nonprofit board? Nurses possess an exceptional capacity for service leadership. Nebraska is uniquely nonprofit dense, with more than 15,000 tax-exempt and 501(c)(3) not-for-profit agencies statewide consisting of assets exceeding \$82 billion (CauseIQ, 2024). Since the 1950's, nonprofits have steadily grown out of human needs not otherwise addressed in a community.

Unlike corporations that divide year-end profits among shareholders or reinvest profits back into the company for business growth, nonprofits reinvest revenue to further programing and services. Rather than generating revenue for owners and shareholders for individual gain, a nonprofit's revenue is used to forward its mission.

Nonprofits maintain tax-exempt status through a community-owned governance structure and volunteer board of directors. Nurses are skilled problem solvers, guided by evidence-based practice and focused on making a meaningful impact, making them more than capable of excelling in nonprofit leadership. The individual and community-level return on investment is exceptionally high for nurses who seek the rewarding challenge of nonprofit board membership.

A nonprofit's success and capacity for community impact is driven by the strength and function of its board. To sustain and grow, nonprofits must continually compete for limited

grants and community funds. To cultivate existing funding channels and seek new financial backing opportunities, transparency of business practices is key. Healthy and thriving nonprofits align with best-practice Guidelines and Principles (NAM, 2024). Board member duties are scripted in an agency's bylaws which outline job descriptions and terms of service. Nonprofit boards range in size, with an average board consisting of an executive committee and five to 20 at-large members. Best practices recommended bylaws that integrate term limits and succession planning. Consider the following ways nurses should feel empowered to amplify high-impact nonprofit work:

- **Ethics:** Nebraska Nurses are supported through the NNA Guiding Principles. Nurses are consistently ranked among the highest trusted professions (Gallup, 2023). Nurses serving on nonprofit boards bring a professional commitment to trust-centered ethical principles of practice.
- **Judgement:** The nursing profession guides competency using the Clinical Judgement Model framework, honing critical thinking and reasoning to maximize patient outcomes (Betts et al., 2019). As nonprofit leaders, nursing clinical judgement skills can serve nonprofits by successfully navigate conflict, maximizing fiscal stewardship, and managing agency strategic planning

initiatives.

- **Advocacy:** As drivers of the mission, nonprofit board members are the leadership and voice of the agency, collaborating with stakeholders to bridge community access to health and social services. Advocacy continues to be a central nursing concept. The 2021 AACN Essentials names professionalism as a competency domain for nurses, and a skillset aimed at optimizing health outcomes (AACN, 2024). This includes undergraduate BSN sub-competencies that demonstrate accountability to the individual, society, and profession through involvement with professional organizations and engagement in advocacy to promote health.
- **Interprofessional work:** The modern healthcare workforce necessitates strong interprofessional skills. Nurses are well equipped to enhance and operationalize nonprofit policies that align with best practices for optimizing health. Nonprofit board involvement is an evidenced way to expand professional development of personal capacities for leadership, management, and collaboration (DeSimone & Roberts, 2023). Ethically-sound nonprofits offer transparency of their leadership and impact. Nurses interested in nonprofit leadership can begin research by population or area of focus through nonprofit registries. Guidestar.org is a repository

site for all registered tax-exempt organizations. With a free account, you can conduct research on agency financials, leadership, and mission impact. Once a prospective agency is identified, nurses should review the company mission and values for personal alignment. Agencies are encouraged, but not required, to publish annual reports for stakeholders via their website. When available, these offer transparency and at-a-glance insights regarding a company's financial health and programmatic impact. The most efficient charities spend approximately 75% of their funds on programming (CharityWatch, 2024). GuideStar ratings (one to four stars) are based on criteria related to nonprofit financial transparency and effectiveness (Guidestar.org, 2025).

Curious how to join a board? Active board members typically recruit through personal networking channels. Board positions are rarely externally visible yet frequently available. Interested persons may submit an email letter of interest to an agency director. Self-efficacy and advocacy are necessary unless you know current board leadership. Nonprofits are governed by community volunteers, and agencies seek members of varied professional expertise. Express interest in the agency and request an opportunity to learn more. Consider volunteering at the organization first to better understand the programs and agency culture. Once you open the doors to nonprofit service you expand opportunities for future leadership roles. Before committing to a board position, ask to meet with current board members to discuss roles and expectations. *How often does the board meet? What are monthly average time commitments?*

*Are the agency Bylaws available for review? What are the expectations of board members? Is there a financial commitment involved?* Board obligations and service roles vary widely across agencies. Interviewing for board positions involves a two-way rightness of fit.

Why join a board? As nurses collectively navigate complex healthcare across post-pandemic settings, altruistic volunteering is positively tied to burnout prevention (Nichol et al., 2024). Consider philanthropic service of time and talent as personal investments in your holistic wellbeing. A recent meta-analysis by Nichols and colleagues (2024) lends strong evidence that volunteerism has sustained health effects on satisfaction, social connection, wellbeing, and quality of life. Research further supports improved mortality and varied physical health benefits of volunteerism across the lifespan. Additionally, nonprofit leadership can offer continued impact-driven fulfillment for retired nurses. Board positions require a significant commitment, but if you are curious to explore servant leadership, consider the rich varied



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benefits of nonprofit service and take the necessary steps to begin the journey. 🔥

**References online:**  
[myamericannurse.com/?p=419635](https://myamericannurse.com/?p=419635)



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