

The Role of an Executive Director of a Nonprofit Organization

What is the role of an executive director of a nonprofit organization?

Management Role. Executive directors oversee the heads of each department in a **nonprofit**, including marketing, fundraising, program development, HR management and accounting. **Executive directors** can also oversee one or more lower-level **executives** in larger **organizations**.

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An executive director sits in the top spot in a nonprofit organization, and performs a range of duties similar to those of chief executive officers in corporate businesses. These include working with the board, managing the organization, and reaching out to the community.

Nonprofit organizations are structured in a slightly different way than for-profit businesses, although there are a few similarities. The makeup and duties of a nonprofit's executive management team, for example, is similar to for-profit companies in a number of ways. An executive director sits in the top spot in a nonprofit organization, and performs a range of duties similar to those of chief executive officers in corporate businesses. Understanding the role of an executive director of a nonprofit organization can shed light into how nonprofits function on the inside.

Working with the Board

An experienced board of directors can provide strategic guidance, valuable contacts and resources to nonprofit organizations. While the board of directors is responsible for making a range of vital company decisions, it is not involved in making day-to-day operational decisions.

As the most senior manager in the operational hierarchy, one of an executive director's main roles is to act as a liaison between the board of directors and the rest of the organization. Executive directors meet with the board regularly to keep them informed on operational issues and work with them to come up with strategic solutions to complex challenges.

Management Role

Executive directors oversee the heads of each department in a nonprofit, including marketing, fundraising, program development, HR management and accounting. Executive directors can also oversee one or more lower-level executives in larger organizations.

Department leaders look to the director for strategic guidance in their areas. The executive director leads the fundraising department in setting annual income goals, for example, and works with program development managers to set standards for serving the organization's targeted needs groups. The smaller a nonprofit organization is, the more directly involved the director is likely to be in each departmental function. In the smallest nonprofits, for example, an executive director may handle all accounting duties and half of the fundraising duties, in addition to executive-level duties.

Public Relations

Executive directors fulfill vital roles outside the office and after normal business hours. Directors are expected to attend and possibly host a range of fundraising events, new program inaugurations and public relations events. Directors often speak directly with reporters, donors, government representatives and members of the community at these events, spending a good deal of time acting as the public face of the organization.

Executive directors must keep a spotless personal reputation because of the additional scrutiny, which is not always the case in for-profit businesses. A personal scandal in the life of an executive director can tarnish a nonprofit's reputation for years. In a way, a director has to consider himself on duty at all time as a representative of the organization.

Company Liaison

In addition to appearing at official events, executive directors act as a liaison between their organizations and a range of external stakeholders. Directors develop and maintain relationships with other nonprofit leaders, for example, looking for opportunities to partner with other organizations to serve good causes. Directors also work personally with leaders in the business and government world, cultivating long-term strategic

partnerships or donor relationships to increase the organization's effectiveness serving unmet needs. An experienced director brings with him or her an established set of business and professional contacts that can be of significant value to an organization's mission.