



Staggered Board Terms

It is very important that board terms be staggered, and your Board terms are codified in your Bylaws. A staggered term system allows a certain number of new members to be chosen each year, preventing no more than one half (preferably one third) of the terms from expiring at the same time.

Staggered Board terms promote continuity on the Board by ensuring there is always a group of experienced directors on the Board while the new directors are getting up to speed. The Bylaws may also specify ex-officio directors who are not subject to terms (ex-officio directors are serving on the board “by reason of their position” such as a founder or the President/Executive Director).

Benefits of Term Limits

Having term limits also makes it easy to part ways with unproductive Board members. It positions the nonprofit to replace them with new directors with fresh energy and vision. Term limits also provide a way for Board directors to step down gracefully when they no longer desire to serve.

Term limits help a board stay current with changing times. What worked ten years ago might not work now, but it often takes new people with new ideas to realize that, rather than simply people changing their minds.

Term limits help prevent an individual board member from accumulating too much control over the Board. Someone who has been there for a long time may be less flexible and innovative, and prevent the organization's growth.

How Many Members Should a Board Have?

Boards operate best when there is an uneven number of members that provides a tie-breaking vote. Smaller Boards allow the organization to be a bit more nimble--specially when committees are used to augment the work of the Board. 5, 7, or 9 members is an ideal size.

The most common term structures are 3 consecutive 2-year terms, or 2 consecutive three-year terms. Boards can allow a director to take a year off and then be elected to rejoin the Board. The example below illustrates 2 consecutive 3-year terms.

Board Member	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Bill	Year 2	Year 3	Re-election Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	-
Sue	Year 2	Year 3	Re-election Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	-
Miguel	Year 2	Year 3	Re-election Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	-
Phil	Election Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Re-election Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Mary	Election Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Re-election Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Khalifa	--		Election Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Re-election Year 1
Anne	--		Election Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Re-election Year 1
Kwan						Election Year 1
# Members	5	5	7	7	7	5

Implementing Term Limits

- 1.If your Bylaws don't indicate term limits, then just amend the Bylaws!
- 2.Next, divide your board into thirds. At the beginning of the next fiscal year, deem one third of the board to be in their first year of a three year term, one third to be in their second year, and one third to be in their third year.
- 3.You can either draw straws to get a staggered board rotation started after doing this, or ask for preferences and then sort it out as a committee.

Term limits allow a Board to grow in experience, vision, and financial capacity—especially the Board of a small nonprofit. What started out as a group of engaged volunteers with a dream could grow to become a community institution with stable resources and a big impact!