

Common board member blunders: 5 do's and don'ts

Community association board members are well-intentioned and want to help their communities be their best. And just like everyone, board members can make mistakes. Knowing some of the most common pitfalls can help your board avoid them and be more effective.

1 Don't: Ignore roles and responsibilities

Your job as an association board member comes with many unique challenges and responsibilities. Don't skip over the basics, such as your fiduciary duty, policy creation and enforcement and alignment with fellow board members.

Do: Pursue learning and board education

At a minimum, new board members should participate in an orientation and training and become familiar with governing documents (your management company should facilitate this). To take your knowledge to the next level, you may also want to attend (at least virtually) other communities' board meetings.

2 Don't: Discount resident feedback and concerns

While it may be tempting to "go your own way" once you've been elected to your board of directors, residents who feel ignored are less likely to follow policies or get involved in the community. They are also less likely to trust their board. Trust, compliance and two-way communication are key to healthy board and resident relationships.

Do: Make getting feedback a standard operating procedure

Send out regular surveys so residents can express their concerns, ideas and interests, as well as weigh in on future initiatives. And when you create new policies or make decisions based on their feedback, make sure you communicate how they helped influence those changes.

3 Don't: Get a case of board burnout

Board burnout often occurs when members take on too many responsibilities, such as managing vendors, policies or financials without the help of a professional management company. Volunteer board members can get overwhelmed with so much added responsibility and may even put the association at risk of liability.

Do: Get help from professional management

Getting assistance from a professional management company helps relieve the burden of day-to-day responsibilities like managing paperwork, financials and other tasks. More importantly, having a professional and experienced team on your side can help protect your reputation and ensure you don't overstep your responsibilities.

4 Don't: Make it personal

Some board members forget that the association is a business. And when a certain issue hits close to home, they could take it personally. Some may even want to develop a new policy or make an important decision strictly based on their own personal agenda. Emotions can get in the way of making decisions that benefit the community as a whole.

Do: Put the community's best interest first

If a fellow board member becomes emotional about an issue or during a conflict, you should feel comfortable asking for a break to let things cool off. From a personal standpoint, strive to remain objective when making important decisions and keep your association's best interest in mind (versus your personal preferences). FirstService Residential helps facilitate productive discussions for the communities we manage by serving as a neutral moderator and guiding the process.

5 Don't: Skip long-term planning to meet short-term goals

When board members aren't aligned on important issues or abandon the vision of the community, personal agendas and short-term thinking can take over. Many boards forego long-term planning because they think short-term decisions, like urgent maintenance projects or changes in state or local policies, should be the priority.

Do: Work toward the future with your vision in mind

While short-term actions are key to a functioning association, board members should always work toward the long-term health and success of the community. Though emergencies may force boards to temporarily focus on short-term priorities, like enhanced safety measures, all planning and budgeting decisions should be made in line with the board's vision for the community.

These simple steps will help your board avoid unproductive gridlock that will keep you from being able to work effectively in your community's best interest. To learn more, [contact FirstService Residential](#) today.