



Our staff experts conduct “special investigations” into your questions.

Dear Maryland Nonprofits,

I am president of a small grassroots nonprofit board. Most of our members are tired and have diminished commitment. Someone suggested that we need to have term limits so we bring new people onto the board on a regular basis. This seems like a lot of work; it’s been hard enough finding the board members we have. Will term limits solve our problem?

*Jonathan Peaked
Board President*

Dear Mr. Peaked,

Over time, term limits can help to rejuvenate your board and force you to invest the time and energy in recruiting strong board members to the organization. Of course, term limits by themselves will not serve as a “magic bullet” to solve all of your problems related to tired board members who are less than enthusiastic about their service to the organization. There are other ways: rotating committee assignments, an active and engaged board development committee, and periodic self-assessments of the board are some examples. You may also want to take a look at your bylaws covering officers’ terms. It sounds like you may need a break.

Here are both sides of the term limits issue:

Pro:

- New blood contributes fresh ideas and perspectives
- Gets more people involved, especially those who can contribute only a finite amount of time
- With rotating term limits, there is a balance between continuity and turnover
- Keeps board from being tied too closely to management
- Good way to get rid of ineffective board members

Con:

- Can lose expertise and institutional memory
- Are constantly recruiting and orienting
- Interrupts leadership development

All things considered, we recommend term limits. One of our 55 Standards for Excellence® states: “The organization’s bylaws should set forth term limits for the service of board members.” Most boards do have term limits, with two three-year terms and the option of returning to the board after one year off being common. To continue to involve retiring board members, and not lose their experience and expertise, you might consider committee or advisory group assignments.

Remember your goal is to have board members who:

- Are committed to your mission
- Accept their fiduciary responsibilities
- Are actively involved at board meetings and on committees

The best of luck to you. And give us a call. We have great resources in our libraries to help you with all types of board topics, including (to name a few!); board recruitment, selection, and assessment.