



A Board Member's Code of Ethics

Nonprofits must observe the highest standards in order to retain the trust of the donating public and the confidence of those they seek to help. The board provides the public face of the organization, and its behavior, and that of individual board members must be exemplary.

The issue of ethical conduct in nonprofit and public institutions is of concern to organizations and individuals worldwide. The following is drawn from the Nolan Committee Report on Standards in Public Life, a report commissioned by the British government and written by Lord Nolan, one of the country's most senior judges and a member of the House of Lords. Intended to be an investigation into a Parliament scandal, the report emerged with challenges and changes to the precepts of public sector accountability. The Nolan Report was welcomed by the public sector, and provided reaffirmation that accountability is the single most important tenet of public life. These values can provide a framework for any board's code of ethics:

Selflessness. Board members should make decisions in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their families or their friends.

Integrity. Board members should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organizations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity. In carrying out business, including making appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, board members should make choices based only on merit.

Accountability. Board members are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office. **Openness.** Board members should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they make. They

should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands it.

Honesty. Board members have a duty to declare any private interest relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership. Board members should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

By Jeffrey Defries, Assistant Director of The Science Museum in London, England. Reprinted from the March 1998 edition of Board Member, Volume 7, Issue 3. BoardSource © 2010. Text may not be reproduced without written permission from BoardSource. For more information, call BoardSource at 202-349-2500 or e-mail permissions@boardsource.org.