Some of the Best Books on Nonprofit Boards and Governance (2016)
An Annotated Bibliography from the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership

There is an increasing number of useful books available on nonprofit boards and nonprofit governance. This list identifies fifteen books on nonprofit governance (most recent, a few classics), all of which offer useful insights into the work and performance of boards. Not all of these are in agreement; part of the value of this list is to offer a range of readings voicing different perspectives on boards and governance.

This resource guide is a very useful resource for people who are about to assume the role of board chair and who want a reasonably complete and comprehensive guidance on what this unique and pivotal board role entails and how it can be accomplished. It also includes useful resources any chair can use in their work.

This book, initially developed by Andringa and Engstrom for BoardSource and updated to reflect many additional topics, offers brief and practical information on a wide range of practical questions about nonprofit boards and how they should work – topics such as how a board should be structured, the chief executive's role in training a board, and more. Some answers are too basic to serve every kind of board, yet the information is useful for the average board and its members.

This is a relatively comprehensive reference and resource book that includes information on almost all aspects of nonprofit board design and development, including case studies and examples developed by BoardSource from their consulting experience.

Carver's revised book outlines a refined approach to his unique model of governance, which he labels "policy governance." The approach focuses particularly on governing boards as policy makers whose responsibility is to establish boundaries and parameters within which the organization and its chief executive operate, and presents strategies for developing board policies and practices to strengthen role clarity and improve the board efficiency and effectiveness.

This book, which is a useful companion and follow-up resource guide to the Boards That Make A Difference book, provides more information about and explains how to redevelop an existing board to effectively implement Carver’s “policy governance” model for board effectiveness.

This is one of the newest of books on nonprofit boards and governance. Building on nation-wide research, the authors argue for understanding governance as three interrelated but distinct types: fiduciary, strategic, and a newly-explained type referred to as generative governance. Each type is explained from the perspective of what it is, how boards might best approach the work of the type, and how board meetings might be organized to help a board successfully implement each type.

This book provides a compilation of chapters that, as a whole, provide an extensive and quite comprehensive review of the research and literature on nonprofit boards and governance as of 2012, covering essentially all aspects of board design, development, and functioning.
Gazley and Kissman offer a thoughtful and practical presentation and discussion of a unique approach to developing and leading governing boards, particularly boards of membership organizations, based on their research on associations.

This classic book is considered a seminal work on the description of "real-life" dynamics of boards and their leadership, with particular emphasis on the importance of effective executive-chair and executive-board relationships, and its key themes remain relevant to effective executive leadership. The book offers a practical model for executives to employ in helping boards be effective.

Holland and Hester have taken the best of Holland's general work on nonprofit boards and tailored it to apply to church and other religious organization boards. The book offers an overall picture of what religious organization boards should do, how to organize and implement them, how to develop existing boards, and what can be done to address problems that arise as they operate. The book offers practical advice grounded in research on a variety of religious organizations.

Houle presents a classic perspective on governance, boards, and the roles and functions of boards and their members. The book is readable and relevant, although its perspective is more prescriptive and focused on "what should be" versus "what really is" practiced in typical boards.

This book provides a model for understanding the practice of governance in nonprofits, and provides a comprehensive set of principles that articulates the design and operation of an effective governance system. Their very complete model applies best to the boards of nonprofits with staff, and provides excellent self-assessment exercises and development strategies.

Scott presents a model of board leadership and development that focuses on the spirit and practice of leadership and trusteeship, and their roles in the practices and development of effective boards. The book includes useful assessment forms, and explains the operational steps for using them in a special board development approach they refer to as PLANT.

This book serves as a practical resource guide to help board leaders and consultants understand and employ strategies that focus on implementing the pathbreaking model of boards and board development developed and presented by Chait et al. in their book, Governance as Leadership.

This book is a readable yet relatively comprehensive basic guide to board service and the challenges of nonprofit board effectiveness, with a very understandable explanation of the organization and work of boards and their members, and how to enhance board performance.