

How Conscious Election *of the Right Kind of* Accountability Legitimizes Your Nonprofit

WITH ALL THE DISCUSSION ABOUT THE NEED FOR NONPROFIT ACCOUNTABILITY and transparency, there is little recognition given to the specific “conscious election” requirements embedded in the unbalanced nature of nonprofits’ multistakeholder environments. This cluster of articles, therefore, has made this its focus.

Much of what is being written about accountability concentrates on issues of compliance with contracts or law and regulation, and on one-way reporting of financial basics and accomplishments. In other words, it does not acknowledge that when you are accepting money to work on behalf of a particular population, real accountability requires a reciprocal dialogue that not only establishes the standing of those primary stakeholders to hold your organization accountable but also engages with that population: generating questions about assumptions, conditions, and next steps; refreshing the vision; and helping the organization to use the intelligence, treasure, and energy all around it.

Thus, the election of accountability—the answering of “To whom are we accountable and in what way does that work?”—is the election not just of the ethical and moral consciousness that is a central component to a position of stewardship, but also of a greater connectedness and level of effectiveness.





The stakeholder environment for all types of organizations is changing rapidly, through a new cross-boundary connectedness enabled by technology. This allows ad hoc groupings of stakeholders to exchange information and develop strategies together to enforce nonprofit accountability, and that forces a heavier requirement for integrity on those organizations. Understanding your stakeholder environment and with what stakeholder groupings your greatest source of legitimacy and effectiveness lies are core to responsible and strategic governance.