

## Establishing Term Limits for a Nonprofit Board

If your nonprofit board is establishing term limits for the first time or if you are a young board and have not followed your bylaws regarding term limits and you are now trying to institute terms and term limits, please keep these things in mind:

1. You do not want to have any more than one-third of your board members completing their terms in any given year. It is best to divide your board members into classes and stagger terms.
2. When setting your terms and term limits keep your organization's lifecycle in mind. If you are a start-up, be generous with terms and term limits. NEW recommends that start-up boards allow 3-year terms, and re-election for 2 additional terms, or 9 total years on the board before term limiting off for at least one full year. More mature boards might want to consider 3-year terms, limiting to two-year terms or 6 years total before term-limiting off for at least one year.
3. Never lose engaged people! If a high-quality, engaged person is term-limiting off your board ask them to join or chair a committee or to stay involved in some other way.
4. Allow partial terms to be added onto your term limits. Once your classes are established, when you add people to your board they may be coming into a class that has a seat open for a partial term. Allow them to finish that term and still be eligible for re-election for full terms, until they are term-limited.

For example, your board has three-year terms and allows people to fulfill three terms, or nine years total before term-limiting off the board. Your board is ready to bring someone on to the board and will be putting them into a seat that was vacated by someone who did not fulfill their whole term. The new person will be elected to fulfill the 1.5 years left on that previous person's term, and then they will be eligible for another nine years. So, they could end up serving 10.5 years total before being required to term-limit off the board.

5. When starting term limits, divide your existing board members into classes to start. You might want to say that current officers will start with a three-year term. Then use seniority on the board to set up the other two classes. Each remaining class has either a two-year term or a one-year term. Then, each group can be re-elected for another term or two depending on your term-limit policy.

## Sample Board

### Beginning Term Limits for the First Time – July 1, 2010

Your bylaws now allow 3 year terms with a total of two terms or 6 years maximum before term limit. You have agreed that you will allow anyone who starts with a partial term to serve a full 6 years beyond that partial term.

Your bylaws allow no less than 7 and no more than 12 people on the board. (It's best to have a range rather than specific number of board members in your bylaws so you don't have to keep adjusting them.) You set up three classes with 1/3 distribution to start. You have decided officers will get full three-year terms to start.

Current Board:

- Tina – Chair
- Tom – Vice Chair
- Doug – Treasurer
- Susan – Secretary
- Joe
- Sarah
- Leslie
- Fred

Class One	Three Year Term	Current Term Will Expire	Term Limit Year
Tina	X	6/30/13	June 2016
Tom	X	6/30/13	June 2016
Doug	X	6/30/13	June 2016
Susan	X	6/30/13	June 2016
Class Two	Two Year Term	Current Term Will Expire	Term Limit Year
Joe	X	6/30/12	June 2018
Sarah	X	6/30/12	June 2018
Open Seat			
Open Seat			
Class Three	One Year Term	Current Term Will Expire	Term Limit Year
Leslie	X	6/30/11	June 2017
Fred	X	6/30/11	June 2017
Open Seat			
Open Seat			