

# OPEN ARMS' BOARD MOVES FROM MICROMANAGEMENT TO MINISTRY MANAGEMENT



## Overview

### Ministry Profile

Open Arms International provides relief from physical, emotional and spiritual suffering to people around the world through medical expertise and Christian ministry. They do both short-term relief teams as well as long term projects in both Africa and India to reach the poorest of the poor.

### Situation

Open Arms was in the beginning stages of their ministry when they came to Mission Increase. They had a young, inexperienced board and needed training in nonprofit governance. Rather than working on vision, the board focused on staff oversight and management.

### Solution

Mission Increase Foundation spent six months training Open Arm's staff and board through a series of personal consultations, board meetings and training workshops. Open Arm's board changed their focus, striving to impact ministry vision and lead the ministry, rather than manage the managers.

### Benefits

- Changed the atmosphere of the board meetings from frustration to motivation.
- Mobilized each board member to be involved in fundraising efforts.
- Made the ministry more grant worthy because of increased board governance.
- Created unity between the staff and board.

Most board members find themselves in a frustrating circle of management gone awry. They join the board because they want to help the ministry and believe in the vision, but they often end up focusing on the day-to-day minutia of the ministry rather than the vision that originally captured their attention. They know they exist because of government requirements, but beyond that, what is the purpose of the board? As a result, boards often micromanage the staff and programs because they do not have the knowledge or experience of how a board should run. Undirected, the board reacts to the ministry when they could proactively lead the ministry.

## *Situation*

On average, a nonprofit board is three years behind the ministry in understanding the vision. For Open Arms International, founded by David and Rachel Gallagher in 2003, that three year window was the entire existence of their organization. "The board was significantly behind," said Rachel, the president of Open Arms International.

*"Before training, our board was standing on the dock watching the ministry boat. After training, they were in the boat and the boat was moving."*

- David Gallagher  
Founder  
Open Arms International

Open Arms faced the best of bad board governance. "The board would go through the budget with a fine tooth comb and nickel and dime it," Gallagher said. She often spent hours preparing reports for the board regarding staff needs, budgets and programs. "Our board was either completely hands off or micromanaging. They didn't fully understand the vision and mission of Open Arms or invest in it."

## *Solution*

When Open Arms came to Mission Increase Foundation for a grant, they had no idea that they would also receive training that would revolutionize their board's role in the organization. Jim Holst, a board member for Open Arms International who participated in the training, was initially skeptical. "I had no idea what to expect. Worst case, I thought I would waste an hour of my day."

In the end it was clear that was not to be the case. “I totally bought into the whole concept and understood my role as a board member,” Holst said. “We absolutely loved it.”

Over the course of six months, Mission Increase Foundation taught Open Arms International how their board could govern effectively, rather than be a micromanagement tool. Before the Mission Increase Foundation training, Open Arms’ board was functioning as paratroopers, jumping into the ground-level work and muddling leadership.

“It never really clicked until we were in the training that I was inviting the board to micromanage through my decisions,” said David Gallagher, the founder of Open Arms. “I thought I was being responsible and accountable by bringing management decisions to them, but I was inviting them to focus on the minutia and confuse things.”

### ***Results:***

Open Arms’ board’s focus changed after the training. They learned that rather than assuming staff functions, their role was to serve as navigators, planning and directing the vision of Open Arms International. “Before the training, we spent little to no time on visioning,” Holst said. “Now we have meetings that look at long-term objectives that map our vision. God is certainly using the training to refine us and make us a stronger board.”

Beyond governance training, Mission Increase Foundation challenged the entire board to involve themselves in the ministry’s fundraising efforts, providing a grant that could only be matched through the board’s giving or fundraising efforts. “Getting a grant directed at the board was a key step to galvanizing our board members’ financial involvement,” Kaytie Fiedler, director of development, said. “Every one of them participated.”

The board moved from financial participation to ministry participation with the Mission Increase governance model. “Our board has literally become hands-on and is working together to see the ministry go somewhere,” said David Gallagher. “We as a staff are not alone. The board owns our challenges and our hardships with us. It is no longer staff versus board.”

Brian Bittke, another Open Arms board member, said. “We’ve grown in understanding and wisdom regarding the direction of Open Arms. Now, we reach out to those who need to hear about us, taking a more positive role in letting others know about Open Arms and what we are doing, rather than leaving it all on the shoulders of the staff.”

### ***For More Information***

This case study is for informational purposes only. For more information about Mission Increase Foundation, please call (503) 639-7364 or visit our website at <http://www.missionincrease.org>.

*“We raised more than the \$25,000 through our board’s fundraising. Just getting our board involved with the fundraising has brought on more major donors.”*

- Kaytie Fiedler  
Director of Development  
Open Arms International

### **About Open Arms International**

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