

Board Training Kits: Association Personnel The Board of Directors

#5



Southern Early Childhood Association

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The Recruitment Process

The objective of the recruitment process is to identify and select a collection of individuals that can effectively operate as a team in performing the diverse duties of the Board. The work of the Board – and its need for internal strength – should be the framework which guides the recruitment process. The development of a Board member recruitment program must begin with the identification of basic qualifications. Two suggestions:

Diversity

Any nonprofit must affirm its need for diversity on the Board. This includes diversity of demographics, such as gender, age and race. Strong Boards of Directors almost always have a Board composition that is in some way representative of the larger external world in which it operates. This ensures that policy deliberations remain sensitive to the diverse set of expectations and demands put upon the organization.

Board members should also be characterized by diverse linkages to different communities and groups. This diversity is a critical feature of Board composition when it seeks to become active in fundraising and public relations.

Board members should represent several areas and subcategories of expertise. This need for diverse skills and interests is obvious given the financial, personnel, programming, fundraising, public relations, and other responsibilities of the Board of Directors.

Commonality

While acknowledging the need for diversity, the Board must also ensure that members have:

- a shared belief in the mission and essential values of the organization
- sufficient commitment to give the time needed by the organization

Source: Earl Anthes. "Board Recruitment and Orientation." The Nonprofit Board Book: Strategies for Organizational Success. Revised edition. West Memphis, AR: Independent Community Consultants, 1985. pp. 71-2.

Questions Prospective Board Members Should Ask

While appointment or election to a Board is an honor, Board members have important legal and fiduciary responsibilities that require a commitment of time, skill, and resources. Prospective Board members do themselves a service and show that they are serious about the commitments they make by asking some basic questions before joining an organization's Board.

1. Organization's programs and strategic direction: What is the organization's mission? How do current programs relate to the mission? Does the organization have a strategic plan that is reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis?
2. Organization's financial status: Is the financial condition of the organization sound? Does the Board discuss and approve the annual budget? How often do Board members receive financial reports?
3. Organization's clients or constituencies: Who does the organization serve? Are the organization's clients or constituencies satisfied with the organization?
4. Structure of the Board: How is the Board structured? Are there descriptions of the responsibilities of the Board as a whole and of individual Board members? Are there descriptions of Board committee functions and responsibilities? Who are the other Board members? Is there a system of checks and balances to prevent conflicts of interest between Board members and the organization?
5. Individual Board members' responsibilities: What are the ways that they can contribute as a Board member? How much time will be required for meetings and special events? How are committee assignments made? What orientation the responsibilities of Board service will they receive? Does the organization provide opportunities for Board development and education? What is the Board's role in fund-raising? What role will they play in soliciting donors?
6. Board's relationship to the staff: Is the Board satisfied with the performance of the executive staff? How do Board members and senior staff typically work with each other?
7. Evaluate YOUR interest in serving on the Board: Are you committed to the mission of the organization? Can you contribute the time necessary to be an effective Board member? Can you place the organization's purposes and interests above your own professional and personal interests when making decisions as a Board member?

Orientation

Orientation and training have two intertwining objectives:

- To inform Board members about the organization and its programs
- To integrate new members into the Board as quickly as possible

An orientation session should be scheduled with new members between the time they begin their service to the Board and the first Board of Directors meeting in which they are scheduled to participate. This session, to be led by more experienced Board members with necessary staff support, should cover topics such as the Board's committee system, the standard procedures and rules of order used in Board meetings, the Articles of Incorporation and bylaws, as well as descriptions of programs operated by the organization. The new member should also be given a copy of the Board manual as soon as they begin their service on the Board.

Two additional areas of orientation should be included:

- Committee Training: The new member should be given an orientation to each of the committees on which they serve. This orientation should cover the purpose of the committee, the procedures used by the committee, and the policy domain of the committee. Normally, the committee chairperson is responsible for orientation of new committee members.
- Service Area Training: This is usually a short training session conducted by the association staff which aims to give the new member important background regarding the program areas of the organization. This kind of training helps equalize the information level between new and old Board members, allowing new Board members to play a more active role in decision making during their early months on the Board.

Some amount of "informal" orientation will naturally occur, but it can be encouraged by other Board members. During the first few months of a new member's term, the staff and Board should be sensitive to new members' need for background information and program jargon. Informal orientation will often occur simply through the conduct of association business.

Source: Earl Anthes. "Board Recruitment and Orientation." The Nonprofit Board Book: Strategies for Organizational Success. Revised edition. West Memphis, AR: Independent Community Consultants, 1985. pp. 77-80.

Training the Board of Directors

Members of the Board of Directors, just like other association employees, must be taught how to perform their duties most effectively, both as an individual member and as a Board. The following are guidelines that can be used to prepare your association's training agenda for the Board of Directors.

Timing of the Training Session

- Conduct Board training once a year, whether you have new Board members or not. Reviewing the “basics” of Board participation helps to ground and integrate the knowledge and understanding of even the most experienced Board members. Recurring Board training also helps to ensure that all Board members are “on the same page.”
- Conduct Board training shortly after new members are elected to the Board. This scheduling helps new members quickly gain understanding of their roles and contributions to the organization, often increasing their participation.

Who Should be Involved in Planning the Session?

- Design of the Board training session should include at least the Executive Director and Board Chair.
- Ideally, the organization has a Board development committee whose chair can provide leadership for the training session.
- It is also a good idea to preview a sample agenda for ALL of the participants, to get early feedback and make adjustments accordingly.

Selecting Topics and Materials for Board Training

If the Executive Director has access to Board self-evaluations, they should utilize the feedback taken from these forms in developing the agenda. Be sure to include review of the Board manual in the training session. The manual is the key resource for members to collect, organize, and reference resources needed to carry out their roles as Board members. Suggested materials to include in Board packets, to be distributed prior to the training seminar:

- Board manual
- latest advertising and promotional materials about the organization and its programs
- copy of the most recent strategic plan

Sample Agenda for Board Training Session

The following is an example of a common training session agenda for nonprofit Boards of Directors.

Topic	Leader of this Section of Meeting	Time
Welcome	Board Chair	
Review of agenda	Board Chair	
Introduction of participants	Each person introduces themselves	
Overview of organization	Executive Director reviews mission, history, programs and introduces key staff	
Orientation to Board manual	Board Chair	
Roles and responsibilities of governing board	Board Chair reviews overview of roles, role of Executive, and comparison of roles of Board and staff	
Overview of Board structure	Review listing of current officers, committees, and committee chairs	
Overview of Board operations	Board Chair reviews key points from bylaws and Board policies, Board operations calendar, sample committee work plans, and sample meeting agenda and minutes	
Review of strategic plan	Board Chair reviews format of plan, highlights from the plan, and key points about status of implementation of the plan	
Administrative activities	Set the schedule for next year's Board meetings, refine the Board operations calendar, update the list of Board members, etc	
Next steps	Board Chair poses reminders of upcoming activities and events	
Meeting evaluation	Board Chair	

Source: Carter McNamara. "Basic Guidelines and Sample Agenda for Board Training Session." Authenticity Consulting, LLC, 2006. <http://www.managementhelp.org/boards/brdtrain.htm>

Additional Training Tips

- The quality and variety of the training you provide is critical for motivation. Whatever the reason for conducting a training session, you need to develop a comprehensive, ongoing and consistent training program.
- Another vital aspect of a comprehensive training program is continuing education, an important function that will keep all Board members current about policies, procedures and the organization's strategic vision.
- It is a good idea to create a context for training and development. Provide information for the new Board member about why the skills or information is necessary. Make certain the new member understands the link between the training and job. You can enhance the impact of the training even further if the employee sees the link between the training and his ability to contribute to the accomplishment of the organization's strategic vision and goals.
- Design or obtain training that has clearly stated objectives with measurable outcomes. With this information in hand, the new Board member knows exactly what he can expect from the training session and is less likely to be disappointed.
- Make sure that internal or external training providers supply pre-training assignments. Reading or thought-provoking exercises in advance of the session promote thoughtful consideration of the training content. Exercises or self-assessments, provided and scored in advance of the session, save precious training time for interaction and new information. These ideas will engage the Board members in thinking about the subject of the session prior to the training day. This supplies important paybacks in terms of interest, commitment, and involvement.

Sources:

Susan Heathfield, "Ten Tips to Make Training and Development Work." *Your Guide to Human Resources*. http://humanresources.about.com/od/trainingtransfer/a/training_work_p.htm 2006,

Jeffrey Bodimer "Using Training and Development to Motivate Your Staff." <http://humanresources.about.com/library/weekly/uc010503a.htm> 2006.

Become a "Learning Organization"

Training should be an ongoing process, reinforced and revitalized throughout the year. Here are some tips for encouraging your Board of Directors to engage in continuous training.

- Attend training and conferences. Create the expectation that anyone who attends training or a conference will make presentations to other staff about the most important learning they took away from the event.
- Provide alternative sources for learning such as CDs and online learning.
- Debrief every project and initiative. If you have developed a new product, designed an ad campaign, or attended a conference, to cite a few examples, don't just move on to the next activity. Bring together everyone in the organization who contributed to the success or failure of the initiative, and debrief what went right, what went wrong, and what you will do differently in the future. Learn from each project, initiative, and activity. In the debriefing process, seek not to place blame; aim for shared understanding. In the process, create an environment in which people feel safe to share the truth about what really happened.
- Put each person directly into contact with those who are served by your organization. When each Board member personally knows customer needs, she is enabled to make better decisions to satisfy the customer.
- Promote field trips to other organizations. Even organizations in different industries can provide opportunities for learning. See and learn what others are doing about the challenges you experience in your organization.
- Foster an environment of collegiality. Trainers should talk to the group as if they were all colleagues working on the same goal, as this is indeed often the case in nonprofit Board training.

Source: Susan Heathfield. "Make Learning Matter: Become a Learning Organization."
http://humanresources.about.com/od/educationgeneral/a/learning_org_3.htm 2006.

The Importance of Teamwork in Board Training

In a team-oriented environment, you contribute to the overall success of the organization by working with fellow members of the organization to produce results. Successful team building, that creates effective, focused work teams, requires attention to each of the following:

- Clear Expectations: Has executive leadership clearly communicated its expectations for the Board's performance and expected outcomes? Is the organization demonstrating constancy of purpose in supporting the Board with resources of people, time and money?
- Context: Do Board members understand why they are participating on the Board? Do they understand how the strategy of using committees will help the organization attain its goals?

- Commitment: Do Board members want to participate on the Board, and do they feel the organization's mission is important? Are members committed to accomplishing the mission and expected outcomes? Do members perceive their service as valuable to the organization and to their own careers? Do members expect their skills to grow and develop on the Board of Directors?
- Competence: Does the Board feel that its members have the knowledge, skill and capability to address the issues for which the organization was formed? If not, does the organization have access to the help it needs? Does the Board feel it has the resources, strategies and support needed to accomplish its mission?
- Control: Does the Board have enough freedom and empowerment to feel the ownership necessary to accomplish its charter? At the same time, do Board members clearly understand their boundaries? Do Board members hold each other accountable for project timelines, commitments and results?
- Collaboration: Does the Board understand team and group process? Are Board members working together effectively interpersonally?
- Communication: Are Board members clear about the priority of their tasks? Is there an established method for committees to receive honest performance feedback? Are necessary conflicts raised and addressed?
- Creative Innovation: Does the organization value creative thinking, unique solutions, and new ideas? Does it provide the training, education, access to books and films, and field trips necessary to stimulate new thinking?
- Consequences: Do Board members feel responsible and accountable for Board achievements?
- Coordination: Have priorities and resource allocation been planned across issue areas and committees? Are cross-functional and multi-issue teams common and working together effectively? Is the organization developing a customer-focused orientation?

Source: Susan Heathfield. "Twelve Tips for Team Building: How to Build Successful Work Teams." http://humanresources.about.com/od/involvementteams/a/twelve_tip_team.htm 2006.

Evaluating Board Membership

Getting the maximum performance out of Board members can often be difficult, especially if you have 30 or 40 members to evaluate. Therefore, having policies and procedures in place to help weed out those not performing is vital to developing a top-notch board. Here are few tips in dealing with underachieving Board members:

- Use the regular nominating process to ask all Board members whether they want to remain on the Board. Don't assume that you have to wait until a Board member's term is up to ask them if they want to continue.

- Take advantage of opportunities for Board renewal. Consider the possibility that poor group dynamics, lagging energy or burnout experienced by the Board as a group contributes to the inactivity and lethargy of some members. A Board self-assessment or planning retreat can provide an opportunity to re-connect with mission and strengthen relationships within the group.
- Don't assume that the performance of individual Board members can't change, or that it won't change over time. A new project or a new committee assignment may energize a slacking Board member.

Source: "Evaluating Who Stays or Goes." *The NPT Weekly*. www.nptimes.com 2006.

Improving the Effectiveness of the Board of Directors

To Promote Efficient Board and Committee Work:

- Prepare a written job description for individual Board members.
- Develop an annual schedule of meetings, determined a year in advance.
- Circulate clear and thorough information materials, including an agenda, to all members two to three weeks before each meeting.
- Maintain complete and accurate minutes of all meetings.
- Keep meetings brief and well focused. Stimulate the broadest possible participation by members.
- Ask each Board member to serve on at least one Board committee or task force. (For new members, one committee assignment is sufficient.)
- Acknowledge members' accomplishments and contributions in a variety of ways in the organization's newsletter, at meetings, in minutes.

To Encourage Smooth-functioning Committees:

- Prepare written statements of committee and task force responsibilities, guidelines and goals. These organizational documents, which should be approved by the Board Chair, should be reviewed every one to two years and revised if necessary.
- Make work assignments according to the background, expertise, and schedule of each member.
- Distribute tasks among members so that everyone participates but no one is overloaded.
- Create a system of checks and balances to monitor committee members' work and assure that tasks are completed on schedule.
- Assign an appropriate staff member to work with each committee.

To Ensure Committees Help the Board Do Its Work Better:

- Determine whether the Board truly needs all its committees, and eliminate the unnecessary ones. One option is to turn some committees into task forces with specific time frames.
- Draft a job description for each committee. Do not allow the committees themselves to determine their charter.

- Choose committed members who can advance the objectives set for the committee and who are able to attend meetings.
- Set meeting schedules well in advance. Take advantage of electronic communication and virtual meetings.
- Set term limits for committee members.
- Regularly assess the effectiveness of the committees.

Holding Effective Meetings

Use a Checklist to Measure Effectiveness

It is always a good idea to have some mechanism with which to attain feedback from Board members following a meeting or training seminar. This input is critical to helping the Executive Director and staff members make more efficient use of the Board's time and association resources for Board meetings. One method to attain this feedback is to have Board members, staff, and other meeting participants complete a checklist, such as the one below, following meetings or seminars.

Effective Meeting Checklist

Item	Yes/No	Comments
Is an annotated agenda provided which indicates expected outcomes and the action required to achieve those outcomes?		
Are agendas and supporting documents sent to meeting participants in advance?		
Are agenda items appropriate, and is adequate time allocated for each agenda item?		
Do meetings start and end on time?		
Do participants come prepared?		
Do meeting ground rules exist and are they followed by all members throughout the meeting?		
Is the decision making process defined and understood by all members?		
Is "sidetracking" avoided?		
Does everyone participate?		
Is a member assigned the role of "devil's advocate," asking the difficult questions?		
Does the group have the opportunity to contribute to the development of future agendas?		
Are notes taken and distributed in a timely fashion, identifying group decisions, timeline, next steps and responsibility?		

Source: "Effective Meeting Checklist." © Association Works, 2006. <http://www.associationworks.com>

Board of Directors Self-Evaluation

Each member of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director should complete a self-evaluation at least once a year, within a few weeks of a Board meeting. The Executive Director should then compile and interpret these results, writing them up in a report to be distributed in the pre-meeting packets 1 or 2 weeks prior to the meeting. It is helpful if Board members also attach suggestions about how the Board could get higher ratings for any or all of the following considerations, to be discussed at the Board meeting itself. In addition, Board members should also list three to five points, being as specific as possible, on which they believe the Board should focus its attention in the next year.

Sample Board Self-Evaluation Form

Considerations	Rating (1 to 5, 1=Poor, 5=Very Good)
Board has full and common understanding of its roles and responsibilities	
Board members understand the organization's mission and its products/programs	
Structural organization (Board, officers, committees, executive, staff) is clear	
Board has clear goals and actions resulting from relevant and realistic strategic planning	
Board regularly monitors and evaluates progress toward strategic goals and product/program performance	
Board attends to policy-related decisions which effectively guide operational activities of staff	
Board receives regular reports on finances/budgets, products/program performance, etc	
Board helps set fundraising goals and is actively involved in fundraising	
Board effectively represents the organization to the community	
Board meetings facilitate focus and progress on important organizational matters	
Board regularly evaluates and develops the Executive Director	
Each member of the Board feels involved and interested in the Board's work	
All necessary skills, stakeholders and diversity are represented on the Board	
Board members receive regular information and training about their responsibilities	
The Board has a process for handling urgent matters between meetings	

Source: Adapted from Carter McNamara. "Board of Directors Self-Evaluation." Authenticity Consulting, LLC, 2006. http://www.managementhelp.org/boards/brd_eval.htm

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe the process by which your association recruits members for its Board of Directors. Are diversity and commonality, as discussed in the presentation, emphasized in your association's procedures? What steps could be taken to improve your recruitment process?
2. Does your association schedule orientation seminars for its new Board members? If so, what is the structure of these orientation sessions, and how is the content selected? How could your association improve upon its orientation agenda? If your association does not currently hold orientation seminars for new Board members, design a sample agenda for an orientation seminar now.
3. How often does your association hold training sessions for its Board of Directors, and who participates in these sessions? What content is included in the training agenda? What could your association do to more effectively and efficiently train its Board of Directors?
4. Would you describe your association as a "learning organization," based on the criteria presented here? If yes, what qualities characterize your association as a learning organization? If not, what is missing from the culture of your organization that would qualify it as a learning organization?
5. How effectively does your Board of Directors work as a team? Provide examples of both successful and unsuccessful teamwork. What could be done to improve the way your Board works as a team, both as an entire Board and in its various committees?
6. How effective is your association's Board of Directors in the following areas?
 - Board efficiency
 - Committee functioning
 - Cooperation between the Board and its committeesWhat could be done to make your Board more effective and efficient in each of these areas?
7. How often does your Board evaluate and assess the effectiveness of its meetings and activities, as well as perform a Board self-assessment? How helpful are these tools in improving your Board's performance? What could be done to make them even more helpful? If your organization does not currently perform these assessments, design sample evaluation forms now.

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Prepared by the Southern Early Childhood Association

1123 South University, Suite 255

Little Rock, AR 72204

1-800-305-SECA

www.southernearlychildhood.org

