

Components of Board Development

The Board Development Cycle

A basic responsibility of the board is to ensure its own renewal and development. The board development cycle detailed below is one way of describing the key steps in this process.

A. Develop a board profile

Develop a profile of the skills, qualities and knowledge that the board will need in order to address the challenges facing the organization in the next few years. The board profile is a way of translating the organization's strategic goals and priorities into a description of the kinds of people who are needed for the board. Please note that a board profile is much easier to create if the organization has a vision and a strategic plan. It is recommended that a board profile be reviewed annually.

In order to develop a board profile, it is useful to prepare an assessment of current board members. To do this, a committee may want to:

- Send a brief questionnaire to each board member to identify their skills and strengths
- Refer to previous board evaluations (if available)

B. Recruit and Select New Board Members

The nominating committee must find candidates who possess the skills, qualities and knowledge that fit the board's needs. The nominating committee will then screen and select the members. Succession planning is an important aspect of the recruitment process. Through succession planning, members should be provided with opportunities to learn and demonstrate leadership skills through chairing a committee, participating in short-term task groups, taking on a specific task, or representing the organization at community events.

C. Elect Board Members

In many organizations, the nominating committee prepares a slate of candidates which is voted on at the Annual General Meeting. In other organizations, the nominating process is open-ended: any member can nominate a candidate for the board. Be clear as to your process for election; refer to your By-laws for a full description of election protocol.

D. Orientation

Orientation of the entire board shortly after the election is essential. The purpose of the orientation is:

- To familiarize new members with the organization and with the board's responsibilities;
- To ensure that new members understand their legal duties as individual board members;
- To build a working relationship among board members that promotes ongoing support and enables them to come to an agreement on how they will carry out their work.

It is important that new board members receive regular feedback on their performance, especially if it is their first time serving on a Board of Directors. Board members responsible for the orientation of new members should be aware of the performance expectations that are most important to convey to new members. Though all aspects of orientation are important and need to be worked on by new members, directors should clearly communicate to new members the expectations that must be understood and complied with immediately. There may be specific conventions for each Board, such as those related to charitable giving to the organization, that also need to be made clear from the onset (Gill 2005).

Here are items to consider in developing an orientation session/ manual for new Board members:

- History of the organization
- Copy of by-laws
- Mission of the organization
- Strategic priorities, goals and objectives
- Summary of the organization's programs and services
- Membership base
- Organizational structure
- Board structure, executive members, committees, staff structure
- Board member's role
- Job descriptions, expectations, and legal liabilities
- Board / staff roles
- Committees
- Board recruitment, development and evaluation process
- Budget process
- Current year's budget

E. Ongoing Support and Recognition

Board members need continuous support during their term to help them do their work effectively. This may include:

- A "buddy system" for new board members, in which they are paired with a member who has been on the board for long time;
- Regular feedback about their work;
- Occasional reminders about roles and responsibilities;
- A clear indication about who board members should approach for information when they have questions.

F. Training and development

Training and development opportunities are important to the success of a board. A development session can happen in a number of ways:

- A planned workshop for the board to attend
- A guest speaker or presentation by one of the board members
- Participation (by individual board members) in seminars and conferences held by other organizations

The checklist below contains tools that should be used in the Board Development Cycle.

Does your organization have the following:

- Updated by-laws
- Board Orientation manual
- Role descriptions for each board position
- List of elements of an effective meeting
- Board Evaluation forms/ procedures
- Nomination and Recruitment procedures