

New Board Member Orientation

All new board members should be oriented to their role, the organization, and the board in a timely manner. A good orientation process covers the basic information noted below and consists of both formal and informal components.

Formal orientation process:

The Board Governance Committee is generally responsible for ensuring new board members are oriented. In the absence of this committee, the Executive Committee of the board should take on this responsibility. This responsibility includes determining the timing and content of the formal orientation, as well as the people to be involved and the materials to be provided.

The formal orientation may be done all at once or broken up into a couple of meetings. The session(s) should be in-person with the executive director, relevant key staff (e.g., the finance manager), the board president, a designated board member or some combination. The following is a general outline of the topics generally included in a board orientation. The order of the topics should be determined by each organization.

Orientation to the organization: provide a Board Manual (contents outlined below)

- History of the organization
- Mission and values
- Overview of programs or key mission-related organizational activities
- Organizational structure
- Tour of facilities
- Introduction to key staff members
- Current strategic plan
- Roles of non-board volunteers within the organization, if any
- Fundraising plan and opportunities for board involvement/support
- Finances and risk management:
 - Overview of revenue sources and expenses
 - Review of the board approved budget
 - Audited financial statements
 - Financial reports reviewed by the board – how to read them
 - Investments and board-approved investment policy
 - Insurance coverage, including Directors and Officers Insurance
 - Risk management plan, if any
 - Overview of any licensing requirements
 - Other items specific to the organization

Orientation to the Board of Directors:

- Board roles and responsibilities, including legal responsibilities.
- Board member job description/expectations
- Board member commitment form
- Board role in fund development – expected timing of cash contribution
- Board committees
- Board policies (e.g., conflict of interest)
- Board calendar
- Corporate documents: Bylaws, Articles of Incorporation, Board minutes

Informal Orientation

It is recommended that each new board member be assigned a “board buddy.” This is someone who has been on the board for a couple of years and can help the new board member understand the culture of the current board. The board buddy is also a resource for the new member to answer questions and someone who checks in with the new board member informally to find out “how it is going” for him/her. The buddy can also serve the function of being a sounding board for the new member’s ideas if he/she is not sure about raising issues or suggestions initially at the full board meetings. The buddy can also help the new board member to determine opportunities for involvement, including selecting a committee to serve on.

Contents of a Board Member Manual

1. Welcome letter signed by the board president
2. Corporate and historical documents
 - a. Description of programs
 - b. Bylaws
 - c. Articles of incorporation
 - d. Annual report
 - e. Most recent IRS Form 990
 - f. Recent articles in the press
 - g. Written summary of the organization’s history
 - h. Mission, vision, and values statements
 - i. Brochures and/or other marketing materials; website.
 - j. Copy of the current strategic plan
3. Rosters
 - a. Board members, contact information, terms of office, office if applicable.
 - b. Executive Director bio/resume (and perhaps for other key staff)
 - c. Contact information for key staff
 - d. Board committee list and membership
4. Board documents
 - a. Board member job description
 - b. Conflict of interest policy (extra copy of signature page)
 - c. Calendar of meetings and locations
 - d. Minutes of last three (or more) board meetings
5. Financial information
 - a. Current budget
 - b. Current financial statements
 - c. Most recent audit
 - d. Most recent IRS Form 990
 - e. D & O insurance documentation
 - f. List of funders and individual contributors
6. Other
 - a. Organizational chart
 - b. Copies of marketing materials
 - c. Sample letterhead stationery