



BOARD ORIENTATION

Adapted from sectorsource.ca

A thorough and thoughtful orientation of new and existing directors is key to helping them realize their full potential as a valuable & contributing member of the Board. A lack of orientation can lead to confusion, frustration, and wasted opportunities. This is key to supporting the goal of “acting with one voice” as a Board.

A PERSONALIZED PROCESS

- Responsibility for director orientation should be clearly assigned. Chair of the Governance & Nomination committee or Vice-President fulfills this role.
- Orientation begins when a potential director is being considered for membership on the board. Prospective board members will receive certain information regarding organization & expectations of directors as part of the recruitment process. Once they have officially joined the board, more detailed info should be provided.
- Personalizing & tailoring of the information provided can drastically increase the effectiveness of orientation process.
- During recruitment process, the board will have become aware of the new director's skills and experiences, and should also be able to identify areas in which extra education or orientation may be helpful. For example, directors from the business world bring valuable skills, but may need additional orientation about the non-profit sector.

ORIENTATION TO THE ORGANIZATION

New directors should receive information about the organization regarding its:

- **Mandate, mission, vision and values**
- **Tenants, clients, stakeholders, and communities served**
- **Development stage (start up, growth, established) and historical milestones**
Services provided / activities and programs
- **Organizational structure and key staff positions**
- **Strategic directions, with short-term and long-term goals**
- **Major risks and strategies for dealing with them**
- **Funding and accountability agreements**

ORIENTATION TO THE BOARD

New directors should also receive information regarding board operations, including:

- **Board's mandate and the areas of responsibility Board's structure and different roles**
- **Committees and Terms of Reference**
- **Board work plan, including current projects and priorities Policies on motions, voting, agenda, telephone/online participation**

Expectations of directors should be clearly set out and may include:

- **Meeting attendance**
- **Availability for unscheduled meetings, phone calls and online meetings**
- **Committee participation and board work done outside regular meetings**
Participation in fundraising activities and attendance at major events
Serving as an ambassador of the organization

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MANUAL

The board manual is the main tool used by most non-profit organizations to orient new directors. It is recommended to update it regularly to stay current and easy to read. It should achieve a balance: provide sufficient but not excessive details. The board manual often includes:

- **Articles of incorporation**
- **By-laws**
- **Board Policies (such as confidentiality, conflict of interest)**
- **Information regarding insurance (including board liability coverage_**
- **Organizational chart**
- **Profiles & contact info for senior staff & board members Board & committee mandates (Terms of Reference)**
- **Director position descriptions**
- **Annual report, Operating budget & Financial statements Minutes from recent board meetings**
- **Annual strategic plan, including schedule of upcoming meetings Fundraising plan & list of major funders**
- **Promotional material & website info**

The Board can develop a full set of Board policies – this would be a separate manual that is called the Board Governance Manual. See the document called: Recommended Policies for Board Governance Manual

MENTORSHIP

Human interaction also plays a key role in the orientation process.

- **Prior to joining, it can be helpful for prospective directors to meet fellow board members and get a good sense of the board; culture.**
- **Once on-board, the board could assign new director a mentor to help acquaint them with the board and answer questions.**
- **Tailor the orientation process by providing new director with a mentor who is experienced in the areas in which they may have more questions**
- **A new director should also meet key staff members**
- **Visit the organization's front-line operations can go a long way towards providing a greater understanding and also bolstering a new director's commitment to the cause**

FOLLOW UP

Follow-ups are critical to a successful orientation.

- **If the new director has been assigned a mentor, the mentor should initiate informal contact between board meetings for the first few months to address any questions.**
- **If no mentor is assigned, a member from Governance & Nomination committee may fulfill the role.**
- **Conduct a review once the new director has been on the board for six months to assess their comfort level.**
- **Request feedback from new directors about the effectiveness of the orientation, and optimize the orientation process accordingly.**