
Board Development

Board Briefs are a series of "at-a-glance" resources to assist board volunteers in supporting their Clubs. They are designed for use at board meetings as subject matter for a five-minute educational opportunity. They can be discussed in their entirety or in sections. Different questions from the same brief can be posed at different meetings. The CVO can use them or ask an appropriate committee to lead the conversation (e.g., finance, governance, etc.).

Executive Summary

One of the most important responsibilities of a board is to ensure that it continuously adds qualified new board members and keeps them engaged. Board building is a continuous process that should include year-round activities; it is typically led by a governance committee in cooperation with the chief volunteer officer (CVO), chief professional officer (CPO), and full board. Ensuring diversity on the board is a valuable element of board development. Clubs with strong, actively involved boards spend significant time and attention on each part of the board building cycle.

Responsibility for Board Building

Good boards don't just happen. They take care, thought, and planning. Board development is a long-term process and a significant aspect of a quality organization.

Generally, the governance committee will direct the process. In the past, many boards had a nominating committee. The governance committee's responsibilities are broader than those of a traditional nominating committee. Because of this, its work is not confined to a couple of months before annual elections. Some boards prefer to call this committee by another name, such as board development committee. This is fine, but the charge of the committee should go beyond just nominations.

Typically the governance committee's work revolves around five major areas:¹

1. Help create board roles and responsibilities.
 - Lead the board in regularly reviewing and updating the board's description of its roles and areas of responsibility and individual board member expectations.
2. Pay attention to board composition.
 - Lead in assessing current and anticipated needs related to board composition, determining the knowledge, attributes, skills, abilities, influence, and access to resources the board will need to accomplish its future work.
 - Develop a profile of the board as it should evolve over time.
 - Identify potential board member candidates and explore their interest and availability for board service.
 - Nominate individuals to be elected as members of the board.
 - In cooperation with the chief volunteer officer (CVO), contact each board member eligible for re-election to assess his or her interest in continuing board membership and work with each board member to identify what he or she might be able to contribute to the Club during a potential new term.

¹ Adapted from the work of Fred Miller, Chatham Group, Inc.

3. Encourage board development.
 - Provide candidates with information needed prior to election to the board.
 - Design and oversee a process of board orientation, sharing information needed during the early stages of board service.
 - Design and implement an ongoing program of board information, education, and team building.

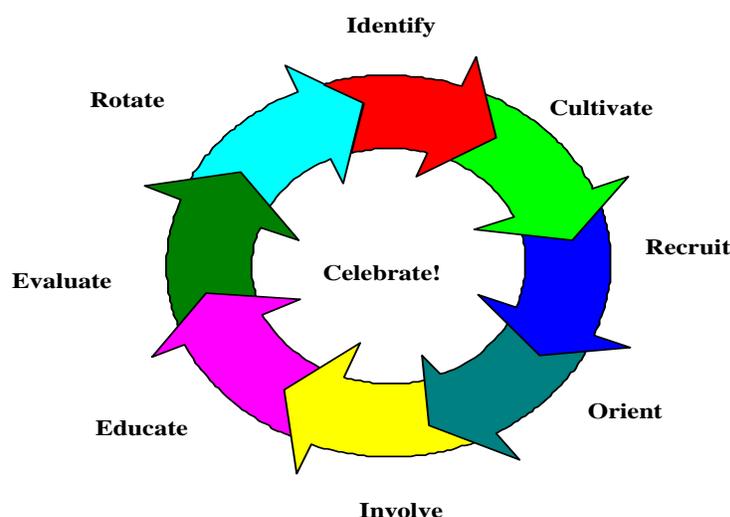
4. Assess board effectiveness.
 - Initiate periodic assessment of the board's performance, and propose, as appropriate, changes in board structure and operations.
 - Provide ongoing counsel to the CVO and other board leaders on steps they might take to enhance board effectiveness.
 - Regularly review the board's practices regarding member participation, conflict of interest, confidentiality, etc., and suggest needed improvements.
 - Periodically review and update board policies and practices.

5. Prepare board leadership.
 - Take the lead in officer succession planning, taking steps to recruit and prepare for future board leadership.
 - Nominate board members for election as board officers.

Despite the important role of the governance committee, board building is the responsibility of the full board. It requires a joint effort between the chief volunteer officer (CVO), governance committee, full board, and the chief professional officer (CPO). The whole board should be involved in identifying and recruiting board members, electing (voting on) them, and then engaging them in board and Club work. The CPO is closely involved throughout the entire board development process but most especially in identifying board members and educating them about the Boys & Girls Clubs Movement and the local Club.

The Board Building Cycle²

The board building cycle is nine-step board development process.



² Source: Berit M. Lakey, *The Board Building Cycle: Nine Steps to Finding, Recruiting, and Engaging Nonprofit Board Members, Second Edition* (BoardSource, 2007).

Step 1: Identify board needs (skills, knowledge, perspective, connections, etc., needed to implement the strategic plan). What do we have? What is missing? Identify sources of board members with the needed characteristics.

Step 2: Cultivate potential board members. Get them interested in your Club, and keep them informed of your progress.

Step 3: Recruit prospects. Describe why a prospective member is wanted and needed. Describe expectations and responsibilities of board members. Don't minimize requirements. Invite questions, and elicit their interest and preparedness to serve.

Step 4: Orient new board members to the Club (program, history, bylaws, pressing issues, finances, facilities and organization chart) and to the board (recent minutes, committees, board member responsibilities, lists of board members and key staff members).

Step 5: Involve all board members. Discover their interests and availability. Involve them in committees or task forces. Assign them a board "buddy." Solicit feedback. Hold everyone accountable. Express appreciation for work well done.

Step 6: Educate the board. Provide information concerning your mission area. Promote exploration of issues facing the Club. Don't hide difficulties.

Step 7: Evaluate the board and individual board members. Engage the board in assessing its own performance. Identify ways in which to improve. Encourage individual self-assessment.

Step 8: Rotate board members. Consider establishing and using term limits. Do not automatically re-elect for an additional term; consider both the board's needs and the board member's performance. Explore advisability of resignation with members who are not active. Develop new leadership.

Step 9: Celebrate! Recognize victories and progress, even small ones. Appreciate individual contributions to the board, the Club, and the community. Make room for humor and a good laugh.

Diversity

In undertaking board development, it is important to keep in mind the value of diversity.

What is Diversity?

It is important to understand what is meant by diversity. One definition is: differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practices, and other human traits.

Diversity and Board Governance

A diverse board offers a number of compelling advantages:

- Diversity on a board is needed to ensure relevance and effectiveness based on knowledge of community needs and access to needed resources.
- Diverse boards can prevent the "group think" that is a danger in homogeneous boards.

- Diverse organizations are more likely to attract diverse donors.
- Grantmakers are increasingly focused on demographic and economic diversity.

Also, it is important to remember that the board establishes policies that reflect the underlying values of the organization. Consider these questions:

- Is the organization’s mission statement inclusive of all children in need of services?
- Does the makeup of the board reflect the diversity of the community served? Should it?
- Do children of both genders receive equitable attention, programs, and facility use?
- Are Club facilities accessible to minority children? If facilities are not easily available to minority children, are there compensating measures taken to serve them, such as regular busing services?
- Does the board monitor progress to see if diversity goals are being achieved?
- What personnel policies are in place to ensure that the Club has a diverse staff?
- What is the impact on the Club’s image or fundraising ability when a board of directors does not reflect diversity?

Questions for Discussion:

The following questions can be used for discussion at board meetings:

- Do we have a governance committee (or comparable committee) to lead the board development process? What changes — if any — do we need to make to the charge of the governance committee?
- What do we do well in terms of the board building cycle? What could we improve on? How will we make the needed improvements?
- How diverse is our board? What benefits and challenges does having a diverse board present?
- What can we do to strengthen the role that all board members play in identifying, cultivating, recruiting, and orienting board members?

Additional Resources

- Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Board Volunteer Training.
- Gardyn, Rebecca. “Building Board Diversity.” *Chronicle of Philanthropy* (December 11, 2003).
- Lakey, Berit M. *The Board Building Cycle: Nine Steps to Finding, Recruiting, and Engaging Nonprofit Board Members, Second Edition* (BoardSource, 2007).
- Ramos, Henry A.J. “Nonprofit Diversity: An Asset We Can No Longer Afford to Ignore.” *The Nonprofit Quarterly* (Spring 2004): 34-39.
- Trader-Leigh, Karyn. *Building Cultural Competence: A Tool Kit for Workforce Development*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political & Economic Studies, 2002.

Revised: January 2009