
Board Structures

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

Boards must be thoughtful and intentional about their size. A general rule of thumb in determining board size is that you want the board to be big enough to incorporate a diversity of perspectives and small enough to facilitate both active participation and effective decision making. Boards must also be thoughtful about the work groups (e.g., standing committees, task forces, advisory councils) that they use to help carry out its work. Like board size, there is no one work group structure that fits all Clubs; however, there are some general trends that boards can follow when developing or revising its work group structure.

Board Size

Occasionally, boards may wish to reflect on their size. Nationally, over the last decade, the average board size has stayed relatively constant at 16 members. In a survey across the Movement conducted by Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) and BoardSource, it was identified that the average Boys & Girls Club governing board had 21 members in 2008.

While there is no one right size for a board, the 2007 BoardSource *Governance Index*, a survey of over 2000 nonprofit board chairs and chief executives, did surface a sweet spot. Boards with 15 to 22 members are rated as more effective by their chief executives and repeatedly report better governance practices. Also, according to the 2007 BoardSource *Governance Index*, nonprofit chief executives experience a Goldilocks phenomenon. Those with large boards wish for a smaller board, those with small boards wish for larger boards, and those with boards of 15 to 22 members feel their board size is "just right."

A general rule of thumb in determining (or revisiting) board size is that you want the board to be big enough to incorporate a diversity of perspectives and small enough to facilitate both active participation and effective decision making.

Work Group Structures and Trends

It is widely understood that the enormous responsibilities of the nonprofit board cannot be accomplished efficiently through board meetings in which everybody does everything. To make effective and use of time and resources, boards use work groups. There are various types of work group structures that can exist in any given organization.

- Standing Committees are work groups that deal with ongoing issues, such as financial oversight or governance. While the members of these committees should rotate on and off, the committees themselves last indefinitely because there is a continuous flow of work for them to accomplish.

- Task Forces are established to accomplish a specific objective — such as reviewing bylaws or planning retreats — within a specific timeframe. They are established on an as-needed basis; when the work is done, the group disbands.
- Advisory Councils are created to advise and support the Club and its governing board. Advice can come in the form of technical expertise, connections, or assessment of various programs. Advisory council members have no legal or formal responsibilities.

Like board size, there is no one size fits all work group structure; however, there are some general trends that boards can use:

1. *There is a movement away from committees that mimic operations (e.g., program).*
2. *Boards are forming fewer standing committees and making more use of time-limited task forces; many boards are minimizing the number of committees to three to four standing committees (e.g., Governance, Resource Development, Finance, Audit).*
3. *Boards are increasingly using Governance Committees (instead of Nominating Committees). In recent years governance committees have replaced nominating committees (used to identify and recommend new directors for the board). The governance committee broadens the scope to include board development and education, as well as board assessment, among other areas, and is more proactive than a traditional nominating committee.*
4. *Boards are ensuring that they have sufficient financial expertise on their financial committees (e.g., finance committee and audit committee if the Club has a budget larger than \$2,000,000).*
5. *Boards are limiting the role of the Executive Committee to avoid creating an inner and an outer circle; effective executive committees have two purposes: review CPO and handle emergencies.*

Questions for Discussion:

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

- What are the pros and cons of our current board size?
- Should we increase or decrease the size of the board? Why?
- In thinking about our board's current committees, could any of the work of these committees be done as a task force? Could any of the work be tackled by an advisory council rather than the governing board?
- What changes should we make to our committee structure? Why?
- Are there any committee trends we should follow? Why?

Additional Resources

- BoardSource, *The Committee Series*.
- Bobowick, Marla J. et al. *Transforming Board Structure* (BoardSource, 2001).
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Board Volunteer Training.
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Chief Volunteer Officer (CVO) Guide.

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