

For an accrediting association, a scheduled orientation/introduction/induction/inauguration of new members of the board offers an invaluable opportunity to accomplish several closely related priorities. In a session presented at the fall meeting in New Orleans in September 2008, participants first heard an opening presentation on some of these priorities, then met for discussion on how these priorities might most effectively be realized. As will be clear, this discussion broadened to include the effective development of board members throughout their tenure. Reflecting these discussions, this Digest represents a short guide to best practices in board member orientation and continuing development.

loyalty of continuing members, and in recognizing the service of retiring ones.

Present appropriate gifts to retiring board members.

Make appropriate use of board alumni.

Celebrate the professional accomplishments and personal milestones of board members.

Provide graceful and inconspicuous exits for board members who reveal their disloyalty or injudiciousness. For instance, consider bringing all members to full membership on the board through a one-year probationary term.

Offer appropriate professional development support to members of the board.

Provide board members with appropriate identification (pins, ribbons, etc.) for organization meetings.

Fortifying Commitment

- Clarify precisely through the recruitment process what the expectations of a board member are.
- Ask at the beginning of board members' terms for members' formal commitment to the obligations of board membership.
- Maintain regular communications with regard to the operations of the organization. Do not communicate only just prior to board meetings.
- Post a photograph of the current board on the organization's web site.
- Invite new board members to introduce themselves to their board colleagues as "fully human," i.e., with personal information about their families, interests, professional and educational histories, etc.
- Communicate respect both for the professionalism of board members and for their volunteer status.
- If political issues have arisen during the process of nomination and election, begin the orientation by declaring all such issues now moot. Make it clear that, once elected, board members serve the organization, not the constituency responsible for their election or selection.
- Bring speakers or consultants to board meetings to assist with certain issues and activities. (Of course, choosing effective speakers and consultants is critical.)

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ASPA Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors

Developing New Members of the Board

A Digest of Best Practices

Getting New Board Members “On Board”

The primary emphases in developing new members of the board include the following:

Fortifying the Commitment to Serve

Effective orientation and development programs typically include a significant commitment to celebration. New board members have been honored by their appointment, and their initial experience of board membership should confirm and honor their willingness to serve. Some possible means of accomplishing this emphasis include: (a) providing credentials (special badge, lapel pin, etc.) for the new board member that indicate board membership; (b) scheduling a social occasion honoring new members that might include a toast offered to new board members by retiring ones; (c) assigning important organizational documents to the new board members, perhaps in a handsome binder; they may use throughout their term of service, and (d) having new members sign a venerable roll book of board members. The organization should endeavor to ensure that beginning board service “feels good.”

Invigorating New Members for Service

Effective orientation and development programs energize new board members by clarifying the importance of board roles, by offering a clear and compelling action agenda, and by emphasizing the important leadership that new board members, especially, can offer.

Informing New Members

- Through both orientation and sustained development, new board members obtain valuable information.
- They review any formal obligations they have accepted by agreeing to board membership.
- They become familiar with operational expectations board members should meet.
- They become acquainted with other members of the board, with members of the organization's staff, and with other stakeholders and constituencies.
- They strengthen their knowledge of recent and current operational initiatives.
- They become aware of emerging issues likely to demand the board's attention.
- They recognize the importance of identifying and declaring any current conflicts of interest and of avoiding any future ones.

Building Board Member Loyalty

Effective board development should build loyalty to the organization that will long survive the term of service. Means of such development include the orderly succession of board members through increasingly responsible posts, attention to the diversification of board assignments to prevent members falling into ruts, and the use of experienced board members to assist with the orientation and development of new members.

Invigorating New Members

Engage experienced board members in one-on-one discussions with new members to “rev them up.”

Create a mentoring system by assigning an experienced board member to each new board member.

Prior to the first face-to-face meeting of the new board, schedule a conference call in which new members can hear from experienced ones.

Offer new members increased visibility at annual meetings by employing them as session chairs, moderators, etc.

Use a “consent agenda” to reduce the amount of time spent in meetings on parliamentary formalities.

Maintain a history of board accomplishments and ask that new members become familiar with it.

Make certain that every new board member has an assigned responsibility.

In the conduct of meetings, the chair should make certain that every new member is participating.

Use parliamentary procedure to avoid tedious “piling on” in board discussions. That is, require alternating points of view until a vote is taken.

Share with new members the organization's strategic plan and indicate whether or not they are likely to have a role in the development of the next plan or in the maintenance of the current one.

Offer a refresher course on “who depends on the actions of the board.” New board members should understand who all the stakeholders are.

Be alert for books or articles that might invigorate new board members.

Providing Information

- Do not take for granted that new board members understand anything about logistics: meeting dates and times, dress codes, responsibility for travel and

lodging arrangements, etc. Present that information at orientation and provide it also in writing.

- Give special attention to the orientation of public members. They may need considerable attention about the process and culture of both the organization and of accreditation itself.
- Provide new members with a glossary of all frequently used acronyms.
- Use board staff to brief new members with regard to board operations. New members thereby become acquainted with who the staff members are and with what they do.
- Make crystal-clear the organization's expectations with regard to board member confidentiality. Explain both the values behind confidentiality and the risks involved in any breach.
- If the calendar permits, invite new board appointees to a board meeting prior to the beginning of their terms of service and invite their questions about the proceedings.

Building Loyalty

Prior to making a board appointment, endeavor to identify a commitment to loyalty in the prior service of prospective appointees.

Mentor new board appointees through one-on-one assignments to continuing board members.

Emphasize the prestige of the board as a valuable asset that must be preserved and strengthened.

Through open discussion, invite new members into understanding of the traditions of the board and make clear at the outset the expectations of loyalty.

Define clearly what “loyalty” means within the culture of a particular board. If there is a “board philosophy,” make that clear through collegial and creative means.

Make sure that at least one new member of the board serves on the organization's executive board.

Clarify the difference between spirited dissent prior to a decision and injurious dissent following a decision.

Clarify communications strategies, responsibilities, and risks. Be explicit about how the organization deals with inquiries.

Recognize commitments of loyalty through appropriate ceremonies that suggest that loyalty runs both ways: the organization will be loyal to its board members.

Understand the importance of social events in welcoming new board members, in maintaining the