

Board Member Orientation Packet

New board members need to feel like they're an integral part of the board as soon as possible. No matter how well-qualified your new board members are, it will take them some time to get up to speed and feeling comfortable enough with the rest of the board to share their honest input. The outline below contains topics or areas that are often covered in a board orientation session. Feel free to use them to develop a packet for your board's orientation, or as a checklist to making sure you cover all the areas that are important to the good functioning of your board.

It is recommended that *all* board members participate in a board member orientation once per year, as a review. Knowing "the basics" about the board will help to ground even highly experienced board members. Recurring training also helps to ensure that board members are all "working from the same script". You may want to use a variety of formats to communicate information, including print, group discussion, and multi-media tools. It is also important to allow plenty of time for questions, answers, and discussion.

Introductions

It is important to offer new board members a list of current board members, a brief biography of each member's background, contact information, and definitions of each person's role on the board. If you have all these offices on your board, don't forget to include the elected chair, the executive officers, board members, committee chairs, committee members, and staff.

Mission

New board members will want to know the mission, vision and goals of the board as developed in the most recent strategic plan, including:

- A brief history;
- Who the board serves;
- What the board does and how (one option would be to include a summary of the strategic plan or the entire plan);
- An overview of board member's responsibilities (operations / fiduciary / executive recruitment & retention); and
- Other (may include recent accomplishments, priority areas, recent news, etc)

Board Norms

Each board has a culture of its own. New members should to be made aware of the customs and operations of the board. These may include:

- Meeting attendance requirements—for both board and committee work;
- Housekeeping items: Dress code, emergency information, public transportation routes, reimbursements;
- Confidentiality statement;
- List of board norms
- Committee assignments and charges;
- Mentor program;
- Board role and relation to administrator/staff;
- Facilities tour, administrative offices and board room; and

- Decision making procedure.

Manual of Important and Useful Documents

It is a great idea to provide each board member with a manual that contains all the above information in printed form. Also, don't forget to update existing board member manuals annually (or more frequently as necessary). Such manuals often include, but are not limited to:

- Mission and/or vision statement;
- Bylaws;
- Governing Policies;
- Minutes of board meetings for the past year;
- Annual Report;
- Audit Report;
- Current Budget;
- Current Financial Report;
- Current Strategic Plan;
- Goals for the year;
- Board members contact information;
- List of Board Officers;
- List of Committee Memberships including Chairs;
- Annual Calendar of Activities and Meetings;
- List of Commonly used Acronyms;
- Roberts Rules of Order (see below);
- Copies of the Newsletter for the Year; and
- Other

Data to Collect at the Orientation Meeting

The new member orientation meeting is the perfect opportunity to update the contact information of all board members and review current board member contact information, including:

- Addresses;
- Telephone--home and office;
- Fax number;
- E-mail address;
- Best time to contact;
- Best time for meetings; and
- Other

Regular orientations will promote relationship-building and foster a good working relationship between veteran board members and new board members, regardless of whether the new members are family or youth representatives. It is most effective to plan this meeting for within the first month of the board's year—waiting until the first or second quarter will only decrease your board's cohesiveness and effectiveness.

Roberts Rules of Order

Action↓ Chair Says→	Interrupt?	2nd?	Debate?	Amend?	Vote?	
Close meeting	I move to adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Take break	I move to recess for ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Register complaint	I rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	None
Make follow agenda	I call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	No	None
Lay aside temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Close debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Refer to committee	I move to refer the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Modify wording of motion	I move to amend the motion by ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Kill main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Bring business before assembly (a main motion)	I move that [or "to"] ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

Adapted from United Way of Minneapolis's *Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits* and the National Association of Mental Health Planning and Advisory Councils and the National Technical Assistance Center for State Mental Health Planning's *Orientation and Resource Toolkit for Mental Health Planning and Advisory Councils*, by Charles Ingoglia