

# Board Orientation Strategies

**"Tips, tools and resources designed to  
get your Board into top gear quickly"**



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# BOARD ORIENTATION STRATEGIES

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# Board Orientation Strategies

## I. What is Board orientation and Why is it important?

### **Board Orientation Defined:**

Board orientation is a **process** to thoughtfully provide Board members with the precise information they need **on their role** in the organization.

The purpose of Board orientation is to provide important information about the organization and about the Board's roles and responsibilities. It also serves to build a working relationship among Board members that promotes ongoing support and comes to an agreement on how they will carry out their work.

### ***See Appendix i - Sample Board Roles & Responsibilities***

It is important to ask the question: **what do the members of the Board need to know in order to do their job as best they can.**

### **Importance of Board Orientation:**

Board orientation is important and required so that Board members can find answers to critical questions:

- What skills and knowledge do each of us bring to the table?
- What do we need to know and learn?
- How will we function as a Board?
- Within what principles will we operate?
- What resources are available?
- How often and where should we meet?
- How will we run our meetings?
- With whom and how will we communicate?
- What administrative systems will we require?
- Will we require outside advice on legal, planning and financial matters?
- What are our legal responsibilities?
- What decision-making and problem-solving techniques will we use?

New Board members need to feel like they're an integral part of the Board as soon as possible. If they don't feel comfortable voicing their opinions, you're all losing valuable input! **Information is what will help everybody feel at ease.**

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## II. Developing an effective Board orientation process

### **Orientation of New Board Members:**

No matter how well-qualified your new Board members are, it will take some time to get them up-to-speed and feeling comfortable as members of your team.

There are steps you can take to move this process along. Conducting an orientation session of the entire Board shortly after the election/selection is essential. It should occur well in advance of the first Board meeting and can be as short as 2 to 4 hours or as long as a two-day special retreat (often in conjunction with a planning session).

It is important to spend time going over **background material about the organization** and **bring them up-to-date on the issues facing the Board**. (This is often overlooked and new Board members may be caught off guard.) Also, be sure to allow plenty of time for questions and answers.

Getting Board members comfortable with Board responsibilities and participating in meetings is a key objective. Not only do the new Board members start contributing right away during the meetings, they also develop a good working relationship with the veteran Board members.

### **What to Consider and Include:**

In planning your orientation, keep in mind that the experience levels of Board members will vary greatly. Some will have served on previous Boards – some will have not. Levels of interest and expertise will also differ.

The following are some key aspects to consider as part of the Board orientation:

- Hold a meeting with the Board Chairperson / President, Executive Director, and new Board members. The purpose of the meeting is to set the standard for conduct and achievement required from Board members, as well as to highlight the vision of the organization that the Board is endeavouring to achieve.
- Have new Board members present themselves and their interests – what they hope to offer the Board, and what they hope to gain as Board members.
- Provide some of the history and evolution of the organization and review interim and long term goals.
- Bring members up-to-speed on issues and challenges facing the organization; and, discuss any key trends that could impact and affect the organization.
- Provide Board members with information on organizational policies and procedures.
- Outline roles and responsibilities of staff and contrast those with the roles and responsibilities of the Board. This is an excellent opportunity to address the potentially difficult issues surrounding overlapping or unclear lines of responsibility.
- Consider assigning a mentor - a senior member of the Board is assigned to tutor a new member in the operations of the Board.
- Consider incorporating teambuilding exercises for the Board as part of the orientation process.

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- Plan a visit and tour of any of the organization's offices and facilities, ideally led by the Executive Director or an experienced Board member.

***See Appendix ii - Sample Board Orientation Checklist***

## **Developing a Board Orientation Timetable:**

Now, let's look at the orientation process as it proceeds through the following stages:

### **During The Recruitment Stage (Before Election or Appointment to the Board):**

Orientation of Board members should actually begin early in the recruitment process. In the **recruitment stage**, by means of printed material provided to the prospect as well as a face-to-face meeting, the prospect received an overview of: the organization's vision, mission & goals; programs and services; and other background information. The prospect should also receive a list of expectations of Board members including number of meetings, committee assignments, length of Board term and an idea of the time commitment required. This can be an opportunity to discuss any expectations the prospect may have for being involved on the Board.

***See Appendix iii - Board Job Description Template***

### **New Member Orientation (Upon the Election or Appointment to the Board):**

After the new member has been brought onto the Board, the Board orientation process continues in the following way:

1. Before the first Board meeting, a meeting should be scheduled between the new Board member and key individuals in the organization. Provide them with a detailed Board Manual.
2. Also during this meeting, discuss options for committee involvement. Refer back to the Board member job description or description of roles and responsibilities presented during the recruitment process. In most cases, committee involvement by Board members is not an option but rather one of the expectations. There should be a solid match between the interests, skills and preferences of the individual Board member and the requirements and challenges of the committee they join.

***See Appendix iv - Standard Committee Terms of Reference Template***

3. During the Board orientation session or at the new members' first Board meeting, introduce them to all current Board members and staff. Consider assigning a mentor Board member to work with the new Board member at least through the first several months.

Remember, effective orientation for new Board members includes a **Board handbook** and **manual** that clearly describes the organization and outlines the responsibilities of Board Members. Of course, nothing can replace an orientation session combined with written materials, to clearly outline the new Board members' role.

***See Appendix v - Sample Board Orientation Format***

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## III. Preparing an Effective “Quick Reference” Board Handbook

A Board Handbook should be developed and provided to all members of the Board to use as a quick reference on a number of topics.

The content of a “Quick Reference” Board Handbook might include:

- A description of the organizations Vision, Mission and Goals
- Definition of commonly use terms

### **See Appendix vi - Definitions**

- An organizational chart
- A description of programs and services
- A description of the Board’s role
- A "job" or position description for Board Members
- Terms of reference for the Executive Committee (President, Vice-president, Treasurer and Secretary)
- Staff structure and description of major roles
- List of committees (with statement of purpose for each)
- Statement of Board policies. (Make reference to policies provided in Board Manual)
- Paragraph on Directors’ Liability Insurance
- A quick description on meeting procedures (i.e. Using Roberts Rules of Order)

If a formal orientation is done every year with new and old members of the Board, walking them through the content of the handbook is an important part of the Board orientation.

## IV. Developing a Comprehensive Board Manual

Below you will find a list of recommended items to include in a comprehensive Board manual. Remember, the manual should be concise and easy to read – a 150-page Board manual will likely not be read! Include sample promotional materials such as brochures or newspaper clippings, without including every article ever written about the organization.

### **1) “Quick Reference” Board Handbook**

- Easy to read as a quick reference on a number of key topics

### **2) General Information**

- A copy of the organization’s Constitution and Bylaws
- Terms of reference for all committees
- The organizations’ most recent Strategic Plan and Operational Plan
- A list of other Board Members and their contact information
- A staff listing with contact information
- Full job description for each staff position

### **3) Board Policies & Procedures**

- Codes of Conduct
- Oath of confidentiality
- Abuse and Harassment Policy

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- Conflict of Interest Guidelines
- Travel Remuneration Procedures
- Nomination Procedure for new Board members
- Financial Structure and policies related to cheque signing
- Insurance Policy (Directors' Liability Information)
- Risk Management Strategy
- Media / Public Relations Policy

## 4) Financial Management

- Up to date audited financial statements
- Copy of the current budget
- Copy of the most recent Annual Report
- Most recent income statement

## 5) Other Information

- Goals for the upcoming year
- Copy of minutes from previous Board meetings
- Parliamentary Procedures Overview

### ***See Appendix vii - Parliamentary Procedures Overview***

- Annual schedule or plan or work for the Board (Including dates and locations of meetings)
- A form outlining the Board member's commitment, role and responsibilities which the Board member can sign and return
- Copies of any publications such as brochures and other promotional materials

Encourage new Board members to approach the Board President or any other Board member if they have any questions after reviewing the manual. New Board members may not feel comfortable voicing confusion or asking questions about policies and procedures at the first Board meeting or Board orientation session. However, it is important that they understand their role and responsibilities within the Board.

**Be sure to extend a warm welcome message to your new volunteer Board members!**

# Board Orientation Strategies

## Sample Board Roles & Responsibilities

### **To establish the organization's mission, vision, and direction:**

- vision and values
- mission and philosophy
- strategic planning
- programs and services
- evaluation

### **To ensure the financial health of the organization:**

- responsible for ensuring there are adequate financial resources for the work of the organization

### **To ensure the organization has sufficient & appropriate human resources:**

- responsible for the working conditions in the organization
- responsible for hiring, giving direction to and evaluating the senior staff person
- responsible for ensuring the capability, suitability and vitality of its membership
- responsible for ensuring the existence of a Nominating Committee

### **To direct organizational operations:**

- responsible for ensuring that the organization and its directors are in compliance with its legal requirements
- responsible for ensuring that the board works effectively
- oversees organizational structure and agency administration

### **To ensure effective community relations:**

- respond to changing needs/pressures in the community
- find new ways to meet needs
- use marketing and public relations



# Board Orientation Strategies

## Sample Board Orientation Checklist

Here are items to consider in developing an orientation session for new Board members. Much of this information will be covered in the Board Manual, but should be reviewed with new Board members to ensure they are comfortable with the information.

<b>Provide General Information</b>	
➤ History of the organization	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Organizational / Board / Staff structure	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Copy of constitution & by-laws	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Vision & mission of the organization	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Strategic priorities, goals and objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Summary of the programs and services	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ List of Board members / staff and their contact information	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Roles and Responsibilities</b>	
➤ Reviewed Board member's role	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Reviewed Executive's / Officers' role	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Reviewed staff roles	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Reviewed committees and their roles	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Discussed expectations for and of new Board members	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Policies and Procedure</b>	
➤ Provided new members with Board policies and procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Reviewed Board policies and procedures with new Board members	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Financial Management</b>	
➤ Discussed Budget process	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Provide current year's budget	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Provided a copy of up-to-date audited financial statements	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Provided a copy of most recent annual report	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Other Information</b>	
➤ Provided copies of minutes from previous Board meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Gave a tour of facilities and offices	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Provided brochures and other promotional materials	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ Had new Board members sign required paper work (i.e. Oath of Confidentiality, Memo of Understanding regarding roles and responsibilities etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Board Orientation Strategies

## Board Job Description Template

Everyone involved in the organization should have a job description.  
The job description should contain the following sections:

**Position:** What is the job title?

**Authority:** What authority does the position have?

**Responsibility:** To whom is the position accountable? What are the broad areas of responsibility?

**Term:** How are board members elected and for how long? How do board members leave the board?

**General Duties:** What are the typical duties board members are responsible for?

**Evaluation:** How will board members effectiveness be assessed?

**Review Date:** When will this job description be reviewed?

**Approval Date:** When was this job description last approved?

**Qualifications & Skills:** What specialized or practical skills are needed to do the job? What human relation skills (e.g. communication, problem solving) are needed?

**Benefits:** What benefits can a board member expect to receive? (E.g. satisfaction of making a difference in the community; opportunity to work with individuals of diverse backgrounds; development of effective decision-making skills; increased understanding of group dynamics and relationships)

**Time & Financial Requirements:** What is realistic estimate of the time required as a board member? What will it cost to be a board member?

# Board Orientation Strategies

## Standard Committee Terms of Reference Template

**Committee Name:** (gives an identity and thereby identifies its general objectives)

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**Type:** (standing, ad hoc, advisory)

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**Chairman:** (may be skilled in chairing meetings, but may not be a subject matter expert)

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**Responsible To:** (board, unless this is a sub-committee)

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**Purpose:** (be concise: why the committee was formed)

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**Authority:** (limited or active; agent or advisor)

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**Timeframes, Reporting and Deadlines:** (duration, #mtg./month, milestones & report dates, date project is to finish)

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**Composition:** (total number plus number of Board members, community reps, client reps, staff, outside experts, parents, etc.)

---

**Staff Support:** (position and actual type(s) of support provided and time required)

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**Other Resources:** (available experts, files from previous committees, workshops, office space, \$\$ from budget)

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**Communication with Board Through:** (usually the chairman of the committee)

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**Specific Areas of Responsibility:** (specific objectives or tasks the committee is expected to achieve during the term or time-period given in the terms of reference)

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**Approval/Review Date:** (the date on which the Board approves ToR, the date by which the committee is to review established ToR and forward recommended adjustments)

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# **Board Orientation Strategies**

## **Sample Board Orientation Format**

### **Introduce Everyone**

- Elected Chairperson / President
- Executive Officers
- Committee Chairs and Members
- Other Board Members
- Staff
- Guests and Others

### **Describe the Organization (Vision & Mission!)**

- Who we serve
- What we do
- Overview of programs and services

### **Explain and Discuss**

- Meeting attendance requirements--both full board and committee
- Committee assignments and charges
- Board role and relation to administrator/staff

### **Review Documents Organized in the Board Manual**

- “Quick Reference” Board Handbook
- General Information
- Board Policies & Procedures
- Financial Management
- Other Information

### **Collect Data at the Meeting**

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

# Board Orientation Strategies

## Definitions

**Board of Directors:** A group of individuals elected by the shareholders of a corporation to manage the corporation's business and appoint its officers

**Executive/Officers:** Appointed by the board of directors and are responsible for the daily operation of the corporation. The titles and duties of each officer are usually listed in the company's bylaws. Common officer titles are president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.

**Committee:** Generally, a formal working group within a larger organization, often formed by election, often having authority or legitimacy of some specific kind. A committee is small enough to ensure that informal discussion is possible.

**Policy:** A guiding principle designed to influence decisions, actions, etc. Typically, a policy designates a required process or procedure within an organization. They are often rules of practice and procedure which supplement the constitution and bylaws.

**Budget:** An itemized summary of estimated or intended expenditures for a given period along with proposals for financing those (Revenues).

**Audit:** An examination of records or financial accounts to check their accuracy.

**Financial Statements:** A report providing financial statistics relative to a given part of an organization's operations or status. The two most common financial statements are the income statement and balance sheet.

**Income Statement:** A business financial statement that lists revenues, expenses, and net income throughout a given period.

**Balance Sheet:** A "Balance Sheet" is the statement of the financial worth of a business or organization which is divided into three parts: Assets, Liabilities, Equity

**Assets:** Anything of value that is owned by the company. This can include money that others owe.

**Liability:** An amount owed to another, not necessarily due to be paid immediately or an obligation to remit money or services at a future date.

**Equity:** An amount that a business is worth beyond what it owes. Equity is the net worth of a business. It is the original investment plus the accumulation of all profits that have been retained in the company since its conception. To calculate equity, subtract the liabilities from the assets.

**Fiduciary:** A person or organization who holds, manages and has discretionary authority and control over money belonging to another person or organization

**Strategic Planning:** The process of determining a company's long-term goals and then identifying the best approach for achieving those goals.

**Operation Planning:** Operational planning is setting out clearly the implementation of the strategic plan against specific objectives.

# Board Orientation Strategies

## Parliamentary Procedure Overview

Use this as a quick reference tool when you need to refresh your parliamentary procedure knowledge.

<i>To do this:</i>	<i>Say this:</i>	<i>Interrupt speaker?</i>	<i>Second required?</i>	<i>Is motion debatable?</i>	<i>Is motion amendable?</i>	<i>What vote is required?</i>
<i>Adjourn meeting before business is completed</i>	"I move that we adjourn."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
<i>Recess the meeting</i>	"I move that we recess until"	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
<i>Suspend further consideration of an issue</i>	"I move we table it."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
<i>End debate</i>	"I move the previous question."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Two-thirds
<i>Study an issue further</i>	"I move we refer this matter to a committee."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
<i>Introduce business (primary motion)</i>	"I move that"	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
<i>Amend a motion</i>	"I move that this motion be amended by"	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
<i>Object to procedure or a personal affront</i>	"Point of order."	Yes	No	No	No	No vote, chair decides
<i>Take up a previously tabled matter</i>	"I move we take from the table"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
<i>Consider an issue out of its scheduled order</i>	"I move we suspend the rules and consider"	No	Yes	No	No	Two-thirds