Introduction

The Board of Directors is responsible for big-picture governance, strategic planning, and fundraising for the organization. Building a strong board is critical to organizational success.

Overview

This guide outlines several factors to take into consideration when creating a strong board.

- ❏ Determine the Right Size
- ❏ Recruit the Best Composition of Individuals
- ❏ Set Term Limits
- ❏ Set Clear Expectations
- ❏ Use Committees
- ❏ Develop and Maintain Board Policies and Document

Determine the Right Size

Boards usually range in size from 12-30 members, depending on the size and age of the organization. Board size generally increases with age. Large boards need to stratify with committee structures.

Recruit the Best Composition of Individuals

Think strategically and plan for future additions to the board. Consider potential members' skills, network, and access to financial resources.

- ❏ **Skills** - Have a diversity of professional skills to support the organization (lawyer, finance, marketing, education, etc.).
- ❏ **Network** - Get people who can tap into different networks, as opposed to everyone being in the same network. Bring on a few celebrities to attract other board members; your goal is that people want to join your board.
- ❏ **Money** - It is best to establish a minimum giving level for most board members and to be explicit about the obligation to give (not give/get). Finding people who can provide financial support and connect to other sources of funding is critical. No more than 20% of the board should be comprised of people who don't give at the full, expected level. Smaller cities generally establish minimum giving levels at $5,000 or $10,000. Larger cities with larger programs establish giving levels of up to $25,000.

Always have a list of potential future board members who you are intentionally cultivating to join the board in the future, even if you do not currently need members.

Set Term Limits

Board members should have three-year term limits. The end of a term does not necessarily mean that a board member must step down from the board. Here are some options for how to manage term limits.

- ❑ **3-year term, no limits to term renewal**: At the end of a board member's three-year term, the Executive Director and Board Chair have a conversation with the member about his/her experience on the board, his/her interest and ability to continue on the board, and expectations for his/her commitment in the upcoming term.
- ❑ **3-year term limit, one mandatory year off**: At the end of a board member's three-year term, the member must take a mandatory year off. The member can return after a year if mutually agreed upon by the board and board member. The board member may continue to serve on subcommittees after leaving the board.

Set Clear Expectations

The Executive Director and/or Board Chair should meet with every member annually to clarify his/her expected contributions to the board for the upcoming year. These conversations should cover the following topics.

- ❑ **Giving expectation**: How much and when the board member will give during the year, and the additional ways that the board member will assist in fundraising (connections to donors, donation of services, etc.).
- ❑ **Role**: The value that the board member brings to the table and expectation for his/her involvement over the year, either on committees or as a member of the general board.

Use Committees

Committees help board members engage meaningfully with the organization. Every committee should have a chair that manages the committee, and communicates regularly with the Executive Director. Benefits of committees include:

- ❑ **Engagement**: Committees are an effective way to get every board member engaged. Board members need to know the value they add and be clear about what they're responsible for contributing.
- ❑ **Future officers**: Future officers for the board often come through committees.
- ❑ **ED Support**: Committee chairs give the Executive Director clear people on the board that they can go to for assistance in addition to the Board Chair.

Potential committees and responsibilities can include the following. Note that not every organization needs each of these Committees.

- ❏ **Nominating & Governance Committee**: Oversees three-year terms, develops lists of potential future members and plan for cultivating them, determines committee structure.
- ❏ **Finance & Audit Committee**: Reviews organization's financial statements (budgets, activity during year, year-end financials).
- ❏ **Personnel Committee**: Conducts 360-review of Executive Director, reviews staff evaluations and salary increases.
- ❏ **Development Committee**: Identifies new potential sources of income and coordinates outreach among board members.
- ❏ **Program Committee**: Monitors student outcomes and the quality of programming.
- ❏ **Ad hoc committees** as the need arises (fundraising events, rebranding, etc.)

Develop and Maintain Board Policies and Documents

An effective Board of Directors should have the following policies and documents in place:

- ❏ **By-laws** for running the board and the organization
- ❏ **Board policies**, including conflict of interest, document retention, and whistleblowers policies
- ❏ **Overview of responsibilities** of board members
- ❏ **Board Assessment Form** for board members to annually assess board and organizational functioning, as well as their own involvement.
- ❏ **Orientation Packet** for new board members**,** including the documents mentioned above as well as a full board list, current and prior year financial reports, an organization chart, annual report, committee information, and important dates.

Additional Resources

For sample documents, reference [501 Commons Best Practices for Nonprofit Boards] and/or the SEA-wide shared Google Drive.

This guide was written by Becky Silva at the Squash and Education Alliance based on research and best practices shared by various Executive Director and Board Chairs.