

Get Your Board Off to a Good Start: Orientations for New and Returning Board Members

Most associations provide new board members with an orientation before they assume their official roles. At its most basic, it includes an introduction to non-profit governance, their responsibilities, and organizational policies and procedures. This is essential preparation if new board members are to “hit the ground running” and not spend frustrating weeks (even months) trying to understand their charge as leaders and stewards of the organization.

Orientations can be provided in person (my preference), as a webinar or teleconference, or it can combine methods. Usually, experienced leaders, with the guidance of the executive director, conduct the orientation. Often it includes an invitation to a meeting of the prior board of directors. Typically, a comprehensive board manual is provided for reference. Sometimes an experienced leader is assigned as a mentor to the new board member.

What about returning board members? Much less frequently, those beyond their freshmen terms are given a refresher on their responsibilities and organizational basics.

Why do they need this? People forget. Over time, they misinterpret. Policies change. Whatever the reason, for experienced board members, reviewing this information in the context of their prior board experience enhances their understanding of their positions. And, it will prompt them to set good examples for new board members and the membership as a whole.

At the least, a refresher should include the importance of fulfilling the three essential duties (care, loyalty, obedience); a discussion of the reality of adhering to conflict of interest, whistle blower and other policies; and a review of the basic commitments made by all members of the board (ex. meeting attendance, reporting, etc.). It can open an annual leadership retreat of all board members.

So, do not neglect the veterans. Re-energize their commitment to being the best possible stewards of the association.