
2. Organizing and Governance



2. Organizing and Governance

Introduction

There are a few basic things to know about the role of boards of directors and how their role differs from that of staff. It is also important to understand when, where and how committees fit in. A board of directors may have a political connection such as a Recreation Board has with a municipal council or when there is a connection to Chief and Council through a band counsellor or portfolio holder. This political connection needs to be well maintained so that everyone is kept informed and linked to their mandates and responsibilities.

Each organization is slightly different; however, in most cases the board governs the organization, hires and manages the senior staff person and sets strategic direction. Ultimately, the board is responsible for the overall finances, governance (big picture policies) and the direction being taken. They are volunteers (unpaid) and legally responsible for the organization. The board will often create a strategic plan that identifies the vision, values, and big picture goals – setting a clear direction outlining what the organization is aiming for and roughly what the budget might be to get there.

The most senior person (Recreation Director – Executive or Senior Manager – Coordinator) reports directly to the board and is usually the only person who does. That senior person, along with other staff and/or volunteers, implements the strategic plan. This is usually accomplished by developing an operational or implementation/action plan that provides details such as how the strategic goals will be reached, who will do what – when it will happen – desired outcomes – and a very detailed overview of the resources needed such as financial, human, and physical (i.e. facilities).

Committees and Working Groups

Executive committees or committees of the board are designed to do the board's business (governance, financial management, etc.) in smaller groups so that the entire board does not have to do everything. They are focused on the organization, usually permanent and are actually part of the board, reporting back to the whole, even when there are outsiders involved.

Operational committees, or working groups, are normally put in place to help move things along at the community level and can include board members and staff, as well as community volunteers. Either type of committee or working group usually has a plan, or a Terms of Reference (an overview to help guide its work and to outline what is to be done and by whom). Committees and working groups are often the ones who will keep things going, get things done or develop something new. They can report to either the senior staff person or directly to the board, depending on the scope and scale of the work they are doing.

2. Organizing and Governance

Values and Principles

Everyone in the organization (board, staff, volunteers and committees) should be working on turning the vision into reality, and in doing this, they should all be setting a good example and agreeing to certain principles or values that will define how things get done. The organization's reputation is built or lost by the way that people associated with it behave.

Values such as not gossiping, being honest and open, showing respect to everyone, keeping confidentiality where it is important, being positive not negative, and saying yes more often than no, can all be part of a way that any organization can do its work and then hold itself up as proof that it is walking its talk. Sometimes this is referred to as having a good code of conduct.

“The only way we can get our recreation board to meet is if we pay them to come. This makes it hard to get decisions done.” – Montreal Lake Recreation Director

Types of Boards

There are several different types of boards. One is a governance board – a type which often is found in big corporations that are well established and staffed with very capable senior people. This type of board simply governs the organization and ensures that things are legal, but it does not get too involved in what is done within the operations of the organization or how. Those tasks are left to the senior person (often called a CEO).

A policy board sets the direction for an organization and defines what is to be done and how. It establishes policies (rules and protocols) and ensures that the senior staff is adhering to the direction the board sets and the way that it wants things to be done. Policy boards are not uncommon in community organizations and are often confused with Operational Boards.

Operational Boards are often found in community-based or NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) that have very few or no staff. This type of board accepts all of the legal requirements of a board, but also does the work of the organization – meaning it develops and implements projects and staffs the activities either directly or through committees or volunteers.

Because many organizations have very active boards (people who agreed to join the board because they like the activities and the organization) there is sometimes an issue over when the board is “governing and setting policy direction” and when members of the board are being volunteers and helping with activities.

A common complaint is that boards micro-manage staff and get too involved in how things are done in terms of operating the organization or making day-to-day decisions. This is normally resolved when roles are clear and understood and board members are able to know when they are being “helpers” and when they are steering the organization. Senior staff too need to respect that the board makes the big-picture decisions, as ultimately the board is legally liable and accountable so it needs to know what is going on that could have a negative impact on the organization.

2. Organizing and Governance

Roles and Key Functions of Boards and Staff

BOARD	STAFF
Volunteer	Paid
Employer	Employee
Part-time (mostly meetings)	Full or Part-time (mostly community work/projects)
Creates the Strategic Plan	Implements the Strategic Plan
Oversees the Operational Plan	Develops and implements the Operational Plan
Creates the vision and key goals, develops the structure of the organization – deals with big – picture policies	Implements the vision and goals, maintains the structure, reports on progress and is responsible for operational policy
Political	Non-Political
Elected (usually)	Not-elected – Hired
Hires and manages the senior person	Senior person hires and manages all other staff

2. Organizing and Governance

Boards of Directors - Skills and Knowledge

There is no job description for a board of directors the way there is for a staff member of an organization. Often the only requirement to be on many boards is that the person is willing to volunteer and is able to attend meetings. In order to help build capacity within boards, the following is a brief overview of the skills and knowledge normally required of board members.

Governance:	a solid understanding of the legal responsibilities of the board and the establishment of policies to ensure prudent management	Strategic Planning:	skills related to long-term and big picture planning to set direction for the organization
Fiduciary Responsibility and Financial Management:	the skills, processes and abilities to oversee and manage the financial interests of the organization, normally by assigning operational budget responsibility to senior staff	Board Meeting Skills:	skills to plan and hold effective meetings and to ensure that strategic goals are being met and that the organization is heading in the right direction
Hiring and Supervision of the Senior Person:	the board is responsible to hire and supervise/manage the most senior person in the organization (the recreation director, executive or senior manager) and requires skills and knowledge related to human resource management	Diversity:	the ability to work with diverse opinions and view points and to collectively have a diverse group of board members to be representative of the community they serve
		Communication:	skills related to information sharing, reporting, senior level public and political relations, and the ability to agree to and manage a communication strategy. Listening is a key component of communication

Communication and Meetings

Ask anyone what the most important factor for success is in any community project and they will say communication. On every level we need to be clear about what we are saying, who is saying it, who is hearing it and what it means. Every organization dealing with the public should have a communication strategy that outlines the basics of how information will be provided, and when as well as what the key messages are, and who to contact for more information. How we communicate will determine how the organization and its activities are judged and from that who wants to get involved or who doesn't.

We have become obsessed with meetings, and yet we are rarely very good at them. Meetings can be face-to-face or electronic, but either way they are the most important forum for communicating, planning, evaluating, inviting, reporting and problem solving. There are countless books on how to hold effective meetings, but the key is to keep them brief, stick to the agenda (yes have an agenda), make sure everyone has a voice and will be heard, and make them interesting and respectful. Food helps as does saying thank you (all the time) to those who are involved.



The Northern Context

Northern groups are much more informal and down to earth when it comes to meetings and governance. We get things done and provide the leadership required – but we try not to waste time or re-invent the wheel. Business is done with good humour, good food and hopefully with good attendance!

Spirituality is a big part of our meetings and most start with a prayer and by showing respect for our elders. Their opinions matter, and we try to include them and youth in everything we do. Our relationships with each other, our land and communities are not separate from programs and services – it is all connected and so are we.

“We agree with Woody Allen when he says that 80% of success is showing up.” – Northern Community Board of Directors

2. Organizing and Governance

What's Important to Know?

- ★ The board is volunteer but staff is paid – keep in mind that the board is the employer and staff members are the employees.
- ★ Boards oversee the big picture – staff the daily operation.
- ★ Board members are elected and usually have very different skills and experience – staff are hired with very specialized skills and backgrounds.
- ★ Committees are set up to undertake special board priorities as well as organizational activities and overall momentum.
- ★ People will leave boards due to inactivity or if expectations are not clear.
- ★ Make sure the board does board work and does not micro manage staff or interfere with their jobs – and the staff should do staff work rather than tell the board what to do.
- ★ Everyone involved in the organization is responsible for setting a good example.

Tips and Advice

1. Keep the board as functional as possible, invest in lots of board training.
2. Hold brief and effective meetings – do not waste time – be prepared.
3. One clear point of contact between the senior staff and the board is best.
4. Committees need clear expectations and to be recognized for their good work.
5. A code of conduct and values outlines the best way of doing things.
6. Boards are the organizational leaders who need to be visible and supportive to staff.
7. Extra care is required to keep diverse boards focused and on the same page.



Story

The La Loche Sports, Recreation and Culture Council is a good example of a coordinated, inclusive community organization for sport, culture and recreation in the north. The Council is a non-profit organization with 8 members, all volunteers. They serve a two year term but can be re-elected. There is representation from the Village of La Loche, the Friendship Centre, Community Schools, Oil Sands Quest – member at large. They meet twice a month. The Council has developed a comprehensive strategic plan. They discuss ideas, make plans, host events, keep up the facilities, manage the budget, obtain grants and encourage volunteers.

“The skills that led me to Parliament Hill were developed while working on a northern recreation board.” – Rick Laliberte (MP Churchill River – June 12, 2000)

“The function of the Creighton Recreation Board is to promote and support the recreation, sport and cultural activities as well as be part of the volunteer help with major special events.” – Channa Senyk, Creighton Recreation Director

Toolbox Connection

In the toolbox you will find the following tools related to this section:

- Assessing Our Organization
- Responsibility, Roles and Skills of a Board
- The Basics of Policy Governance
- Board Report Card
- Recreation Committee Code of Ethics
- Committee Member Roles
- Terms of Reference for a Committee
- Tips for Holding Good Meetings
- How to Organize a Public Meeting
- Sample Bylaw to Establish a Recreation Board