GREEN MEETINGS: WHEN LESS IS MORE

Even the small details will have a big impact

PLUS:
Facilitating for Results
Effective Board Orientation
Board Orientation

How to facilitate the transfer of critical knowledge and valuable insights
By Robert C. Harris, CAE

NEWLY elected board members rely on staff to inform them about their roles and responsibilities. Many associations conduct an annual orientation—it can be as simple as a short briefing at the first meeting of the board, or as elaborate as a weekend retreat to impart knowledge and explore the future of the organization. Topics will range from parliamentary procedure to UBIT and apparent authority. The goal is the transfer of critical knowledge and insights into the year ahead.

Orientation Manuals
A leadership manual complements the orientation process. The contents can exceed 100s of pages, including bylaws, budgets, antitrust statements, chapter operations, articles of incorporation, calendars, rosters, and strategic plan, for instance.

Technology allows for alternative delivery of orientation information. All the information can be distributed on a compact disc or posted on the organization’s website with password protection. Both allow for easy updates by staff, eliminating the costs of notebooks, copying, assembly and shipping.

Examples Make Orientation Real
Use headlines to bring the information to life. When discussing reimbursement policies and the importance of receipts, share a story about how an association’s budget went awry because receipts were lost, officers neglected to submit timely expense reports and the membership eventually claimed “misuse of funds.”

Use cases to explain concepts such as apparent authority and antitrust. There are plenty of legal examples of how organizations have been accused of antitrust violations because of acts such as member expulsion, standard setting, and price discussions.

The First 100 Days
The first 100 days of a leader’s term are critical and the time to start planning is at least sixty days before their installation. So whether it is the president of your board or a chair of a committee, there is a great resource available from the Nonprofit Center | www.noprofitcenter.org.

The intent of the booklet is to help you as the chief staff executive (CSE) give your volunteer leader enough information that both of you will start the year with traction. Your plans, aims and ideas will be solidly planted on the ground and others will quickly realize your president intends to advance the organization and not their own ego. The booklet can be shared, copied and adapted for your organization—please just be sure to give proper credit and attribution to the authors.

The booklet is divided into four sections to help you and your leader understand and organize the year. They include:
• People
• Communications
• Planning
• Resources and Structure

Why 100 Days?
The guide’s authors, Bob Harris, CAE, IOM and Bill Pawlucy, CAE, MPA believe it takes about 100 days to set the course for a successful leadership term—60 days prior to the start of their actual term and the first 40 days of the term. So if your leader takes office on January 1, plan to start the process by the first of November.

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Board Orientation Pop-Quiz

1. You are asked to address a local civic organization about our profession and association, where can you find the mission statement?

2. You learn that a member has allegedly violated the association's code of standards, and other members keep bringing it to your attention, where can you find information on a fair process for handling?

3. A member shows interest in a leadership role and then asks about the kinds of insurance carried by the organization. Where can you find insurance information in your orientation materials?

4. You attend a meeting where the discussion departs from the agenda and moves boycotting a supplier; what information can help you squelch the conversation and explain the rationale?

5. You see the opportunity to engage more volunteers by appointing an ad hoc and standing committee. Where do you find information about the association's committees and who appoints them - without calling staff?

Orientation Answers

1. Before making a speech or doing an interview, refer to the association's mission statement. You'll find it in the organization's strategic plan or a similar statement in the preamble to the bylaws.

2. Check the bylaws regarding processes dealing with membership qualifications, nonpayment of dues and expulsion for cause. Especially note the requirements for notice, a fair hearing and appeals. Use extreme caution in taking any action or making an allegation, and be sure to use staff and legal counsel.

3. One way to ascertain information about insurance is by checking the budget. The line item for insurance will reflect budgeted amount; and in some financial reports the types of coverages are listed, such as D&O, meeting cancellation and general liability.

4. Antitrust violations are of concern for many associations and should be avoided at all costs. The orientation information includes an antitrust statement that directors receive and sign each year. In addition, refer to the Risk and Liabilities section for tips on managing and reducing risks. You should also be aware of the state and federal volunteer immunity laws described at the orientation.

5. Standing committees are identified in the bylaws, as well as who appoints committees and their composition. A committee roster is available to identify the standing, ad hoc and task force committees. Finally, committee administration is described in the policies and procedures manual.

Board Development Committee

Some organizations have turned their Nominating Committee into a more comprehensive Board Development Committee.

A nominating committee is narrowly focused on proposing a slate of candidates and disbands soon after. A Board Development Committee (BDC) works year-round to make improvements to governance, leadership and the board of directors. In this way, the leadership takes responsibility for self-improvement. Here are the BDC responsibilities:

Leadership Academy - A seminar or series to encourage and education potential leaders. Topics may include understanding finances, committees, board governance styles, project management tips, diversity and networking. "Leadership Academy" can take place in several locations, or might be added to the annual conference. The BDC is responsible for developing format, content, handouts, recommended readings and speakers.

Board Assessment - There are many tools to evaluate the effectiveness and satisfaction of the board of directors.Ideally, the BDC conducts the evaluation process rather than the chairman of the board or the staff.

Skillset - The BDC should identify and document what makes an ideal leader for the organization (i.e. commitment to the organization, consensus builder, availability of time, good fund-raiser, etc.).

Orientation - Every organization utilizes a different method of leadership orientation. Sometimes it is conducted at a retreat; other organizations simply have staff brief new volunteers at the office. The BDC should design the best possible board orientation.

Governance Structure - From time to time the board should consider the best possible governance size, structure, procedures, etc. The BDC can periodically undertake a review of options and practices.

Nominations - The BDC has responsibility for a smooth nominating process. Because of the committee's other programs - leadership academy, skillset identification, orientation - the job of identifying new leaders will be easier.

Some organizations are desperate for volunteer leaders. The Board Development Committee works year round to develop new leaders.

Check out the other great, FREE resources Bob Harris, CAE, IOM has available on his Web site at www.nonprofitcenter.com.
## Phases of the President's Year

**Planning (60 Days)**
- Document Study
  - Bylaws, Articles, Strategic Plan
  - Policies, Orientation Manual
  - Budget and Finance Reports
- Build your Team
  - Partner with CEO - Staff
  - Meet with VP and Officers
  - Assign Liaisons/Links
- Create a Plan
  - Review Member Needs
  - Set Realistic Goals
  - Set Performance Measures
- Appoint Committees
  - Inventory Existing Committees
  - Assign Chairs and Vice Chairs
  - Charge Committees with Work
- Communications
  - Availability - Preferred Communications
  - President's Messages
  - Set a Calendar

**Implementation (12 Months)**
- Plan the Meetings
  - Agendas
  - Desired Reports
  - Meetings Best-Practices
- Monitor Progress
  - Rely on Executive Officers
  - Use Staff and Consultants
  - Committee Reports
- Leadership Development
  - Ongoing Training of Leaders
  - Effective Nomination Process
  - Share the Spotlight

**Succession (60 Days)**
- Achievements
  - Complete Your Goals
  - Review and Update Strategic Plan
  - Give Awards and Recognitions
- Communications
  - Final President's Message
  - Dialog with the Vice Pres
  - Report to the Members
- Transition of Power
  - Installation
  - Orientation
  - Board Evaluation Form
- Wrap Up
  - Debriefing with Staff-Board
  - Return Files, Finances, etc.
  - Be a Good Past President
AS nonprofit professionals, we are often expected to “hit the ground running” in everything we do, whether we are a newly hired CSE, a seasoned exec or an industry partner, the changing trends and fluctuations in the economy often dictate that we are expected to do more with less (and have it done yesterday).

The phrase takes on a slight twist for our volunteer leaders...they are expected to amass volumes of information about an organization in a relatively short period of time and then make critical decisions as a group based on limited and sometimes imperfect information.

For those of us beginning the transition to a new board year, it is crucial to not only find the right people to lead our organizations forward but to build their capacity so they not only begin the year on a good foot but find their stride early on.

This is especially important for our incoming Presidents and Chairs where the term is sometimes only one year. While many of these individuals may have been involved with the organization for some time and have had some sort of prior experience leading this isn’t always the case.

This was reinforced to me in a recent learning lab I attended led by governance guru, Bob Harris, CAE, IOM. He noted that leadership and good governance are not necessarily intrinsic to an organization or an individual. We must work as true partners with our volunteers to plan, practice and assess continually - not just annually at a board orientation but throughout the year. Board development is best accomplished as a process rather than an event.

While most of us are not a magical character in the Harry Potter world with port-keys just lying about for us to be able to whisk a governance wizard to our board meetings; membership in A2SAE provides access to experts, peers and a variety of governance and volunteer development resources.

So after checking out Bob’s article on Board Orientation (page 12) you may want to visit his resource center which has a variety of samples and templates | www.nonprofitcenter.org. For the most part, Bob makes these great resources accessible without a charge and he usually keeps them in their original format so you can customize the documents or brand them for your own use. Additional resources and templates are available in the A2SAE Library or the online Knowledge Center | www.azsae.org.

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