

## **Area Councils: Listen, Lead, and Educate**

Area Councils have been an important and powerful force in the Boys & Girls Club Movement since 1944. Since that time, Area Councils have been organized in every state and, in some states; several Area Councils have been formed.

### **Purpose of Area Councils**

It is generally recognized that nationally and locally the Boys & Girls Club Movement must have the active participation of board volunteers if it is to progress and attain its greatest potential in service to youth. Area Councils provide a medium through which board volunteers maintain their interest and active involvement in the affairs of Boys & Girls Clubs of America. The purposes of Area Council are:

- To periodically bring board members and executive professionals within an area together to exchange information and to discuss plans, programs, trends, common challenges, and best practices.
- To work and plan together for the benefit of local Boys & Girls Clubs, the national Movement, and youth.
- To get acquainted with board volunteers and professional staff from other Boys & Girls Clubs – good fellowship.

### **Structure of Area Councils**

Area Councils are made up of at least one volunteer member of the governing board and the executive professional of each organization in the Area Council. An Area Council liaison (board volunteer) is appointed by each Boys & Girls Club organization. As an arm of the Boys & Girls Club Movement, Area Councils are frequently the channel through which ideas, suggestions, and proposals flow to the National Council of Boys & Girls Clubs of America. The councils are often called upon to implement the programs and projects needed to expand the philosophy and aims of Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

The National Area Council Committee is composed of representatives from each region who are involved with Area Council matters. The National Area Council Committee serves as a conduit from Area Councils to the National Board of Governors for considering matters to bring before the National Council. The National Area Council Committee promotes the growth, development, and effectiveness of all Area Councils.

The National Board of Governors manages the business affairs of Boys & Girls Clubs of America. The National Board of Governors initiates, approves, and carries out plans and programs of service to member Boys & Girls Club organizations. The National Board of Governors establishes Area Councils.

The National Council provides constitutional governance and establishes the requirements for membership and operating standards in Boys & Girls Clubs of America. Each member organization in Boys & Girls Clubs of America has one vote on matters submitted to a vote at meetings of the National Council (see flow chart below).

### **Impact of Area Councils**

The Boys & Girls Club Movement has been strengthened as a result of the work of Area Councils. Proposals initiated and discussed by Area Councils have resulted in changes in the Membership Requirements. The creation and implementation of numerous strategic plans, which were discussed and developed through Area Councils, have aligned the Movement to have a positive impact on countless numbers of young people who were given the foundation they needed to succeed. Finally, board volunteers working together in Area Council meetings, with Boys & Girls Clubs of America, in pursuit of state government funding, has led to the creation of State Alliances that have raised millions of dollars to support programs for youth. Clearly, board volunteer involvement and leadership within the Area Council network has greatly strengthened our Movement.

### **Future Direction of Area Councils**

As we embark on the Second Century of service, Area Councils will once again play a pivotal role in realizing its vision, in which *the Boys & Girls Club Movement is a catalyst for an age in which success is within reach of every child, and whole generations of children are inspired to a level of civic engagement not seen since the founding of our nation.* In order for the Boys & Girls Club Movement to achieve this bold, far-reaching vision, Area Councils must listen, lead, and educate.

**Listen:** Boys & Girls Club organizations must have a voice in the future direction of the Movement. The strength of Area Councils is through a grassroots concept. Boys & Girls Clubs of America must continue to create opportunities for dialog at open forums on key strategic questions. Area Councils have an opportunity to provide feedback on what changes need to be made to the constitution, the requirements for membership, and operating standards in addition to weighing-in on burning issues that may impact the future direction of the Movement.

**Lead:** For Area Councils to be successful, they must be driven and led by committed and motivated board volunteers. Board member involvement and leadership within the Area Council network will only strengthen our position in the future. We must continue to find ways to enhance and strengthen Area Councils. A commitment to Area Council excellence will reap great rewards in the growth and capacity of local Boys & Girls Clubs.

**Educate:** Board education remains at the heart of the work for Area Councils. Assuring premier boards effectively governing and generating ever-increasing resources has been listed as one of the six key strategies in the Report from The Commission for the Second Century. Having strong boards is critical to building the capacity of Boys & Girls Clubs. In response to this need, Boys & Girls Clubs of America has recently updated its BOARDROOM resources. The BOARDROOM utilizes comprehensive training, consultation, and technical assistance to support the education needs of our lay leaders. BOARDROOM training modules can be provided at Area Council meetings that speak to the key topics of board competencies, the board's responsibilities, the board's role in fundraising, and many other critical areas that address board governance.

By actively engaging board volunteers and professionals in the work of Area Councils and through the principles of listening ... leading ... and educating; Area Councils will continue to have an impact on building a stronger Boys & Girls Club Movement.