



BOARD BRIEF: Effective Onboarding Practices

Board Briefs are "at-a-glance" resources that help board volunteers better support their Boys & Girls Club. They are designed to occur as five-minute education opportunities at board meetings.

SUMMARY

In this Board Brief, the Boys & Girls Club of the Smoky Mountains in Sevier County, Tenn., provides a Teachable Point of View about effectively onboarding new volunteers for their board of directors. Guided by the belief that board development is the single most important factor in their organization's success formula, this Club assigns every board member a clear role to embrace, and sets a goal for new volunteers to understand the Club's mission, vision and values before they begin board service. Their three-step onboarding process for the board is detailed below.

THREE-STEP ONBOARDING PROCESS

Step One: Select Prospects to Fit Needs

First, the board development committee meets early each fall to discuss areas of organizational need and identify relevant prospects. Next, the board development committee opens nominations to the full board, using a template form to identify whether prospects fill a need or provide a valuable service. Sometimes, many names are identified, but usually one prospect is a best fit. At the November board meeting, the board development committee submits a slate of proposed officers and prospective board members for the upcoming year. By affirming the list of prospective board members, the full board understands it is giving approval for membership if prospects say yes.

Step Two: Focus on Organizational Values, Standards and Expectations

Board members contact their nominated prospects to gauge interest in attending one of two orientations for prospective board members at a Club site. These board orientations include a tour, organizational history, committee descriptions, budget information, and an overview of programs and services. Four unique aspects comprise the secret to success in this board process:

1. From start to finish, the Board Development Chair and other board volunteers run these orientations. The CEO only assists as needed. This peer-to-peer discussion demonstrates the board's commitment to youth development.
2. The Board Development Chair tells prospective board members they have been identified to serve in a *specific role* critical to ongoing success. Everyone wants to feel important and this is a powerful step in the process.
3. The orientation introduces Board Member Performance Standards. The Board Development Chair reads the standards aloud and explains the importance of each.
4. Prospective board members are informed about the organization's key business values:
 - The board leads the way: the largest percentage of income is board-raised dollars.



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- At least 66% of members receive free or reduced-price lunch.
- No more than 25% of funding comes from one source (except board-raised funds).
- We are dedicated to serving youth until they are 18 years of age.

Step Three: Activate New Members in Service Early and Often

New board members are approved in mid-November and sworn in at our Annual Meeting held in January. To ensure immediate board engagement, new members are assigned several tasks to complete *before being sworn in* at the Annual Meeting:

- Participate in Board Tour Day, a half-day educational experience at all five Club locations, to see where great futures start firsthand.
- Meet current board members by attending the December board meeting as guests.
- Attend the investor appreciation event to learn the scope of our work and meet the investors who make it possible.
- Attend the Fine Art Show that immediately precedes the Annual Meeting.

FINAL THOUGHTS

To ensure all new members are “on board,” the board development committee expends great effort to share its clear sense of mission, vision and values. Before a new board member has completed a week of service, each has visited all Club sites, possesses a job description, been assigned to a committee and met some long-term investors. After attending their first board meeting as an official member, new members attend the Strategic Planning Meeting to help set direction for the organization. Ongoing mentoring is provided in the first year by the board members who nominated them.

The art of board development is a process that is refined each year. It starts with a dedicated board development chair with ability and commitment to lead. It engages a committee of individuals dedicated to excellence. The importance of this process is affirmed each January when a new crop of inspired, enabled volunteers are onboarded, ready to move the mission and vision forward for the next generation.

