



## **BEST BOARD PRACTICES CHECKLIST: NEW BOARD MEMBER ORIENTATION PROCESS**

All new board members should participate in an orientation process shortly after election to the board.

To design your board's orientation process, consider these best practices.

### **Before Submitting the Prospective Director's Name for Election**

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1. Meet with the prospective director and review a copy of the position description for a board member. Before agreeing to be nominated, a prospective director should understand the responsibilities and expectations of the position, especially the time required for board meetings, education, and public/community events.
  - The board of one public hospital, whose members are elected by the County Commissioners, holds an orientation session for individuals seeking a board seat – so they can assess whether *really* want the job.
2. Make participation in orientation mandatory during the director's first term. Do not reappoint directors who fail to fulfill this requirement.
3. Schedule an annual, new member orientation session well in advance on the board's annual calendar, so all new members can set aside the date when they are elected.

### **After Election: The Initial Orientation**

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4. Plan an educational session of at least three hours. Some large regional and national health systems have 1-2 day orientation meetings. Educational content should enable a new member to answer these questions:
  - What are the board's fiduciary duties, roles and responsibilities?
  - How is the board organized to do its work? How are major decisions made?
  - What is expected of me as a board member? What information do I have access to? How can I suggest agenda items for board and committee meetings?
  - What is the mission and what are the values of the organization?
  - Why was the organization founded? What are the important milestones of the organization's history, and how do these relate to today's priorities?
  - What are the major industry trends a board member should be aware of?
  - What are the organization's major programs and services? What are the healthcare needs of the communities and populations it serves?
  - What is the organizational structure of the hospital or health system -- and of the medical staff?
  - What is the organization's budget? Review the current financial statements, and highlight key indicators and red flags to watch for.
  - What is the organization's strategic direction? Review the strategic plan as well as the long range capital financing plan and master facility plan.
  - How does the organization maintain and improve the quality of care, patient safety, and customer satisfaction? Review current priorities and performance.

### **After Election: The Initial Orientation (continued)**

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5. If a group of new members is joining the board, schedule the orientation session as a seminar or workshop. If there are just one or two new members, the session can be more informal, but still cover the same content.
6. Keep the material on a governance level: Stress high-level issues and concerns, the big picture, the vision and strategy -- not operational matters.
7. Tap several individuals, not just the CEO, to deliver the orientation. For example:
  - *Chairman of the Board*: Describes the board's role and responsibilities and the expectations of individual members
  - *Legal counsel*: Outlines fiduciary duties, conflict of interest procedures, and current legal issues
  - *CEO*: Provides the overview of the organization's strategic direction, its major programs and services, and industry trends
  - *Chief Financial Officer*: Explains the financial statement and key indicators
  - *Chief Medical Officer*: Explains the medical staff structure and quality/patient safety issues
8. Don't make the program all lecture – include time for questions and discussion.
9. Make it fun. One health system designed a “Jeopardy game” as part of its orientation program. Others use case studies to engage new members in problem solving and creative thinking.
10. Include a tour of major facilities. Ask staff to lead the tour in their areas.
11. Schedule a lunch with a few other board members and medical staff leaders.
12. Provide each new member with an Orientation Manual. (See the “Best Board Practices Checklist for a New Board Member Orientation Manual,” at [www.GreatBoards.org](http://www.GreatBoards.org).)
13. Send new members to outside orientation programs, such as The Governance Institute's seminars before its Leadership Conferences.

### **After the Initial Orientation: The First Year**

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14. Ask new members to write and share a “Personal Learning Plan” that describes additional areas where they'd like education, people they'd like to meet, and resources they want to review.
15. Based on the Personal Learning Plans, conduct “drill down” sessions on pertinent subject areas of interest. Examples might include:
  - New member of the Finance Committee meets with CFO to review reimbursement, managed care contracts, and capital financing in more detail
  - New member of the Board's Quality Committee meets with the Chief Medical Officer to gain deeper understanding of how the quality of care is measured and improved
16. Assign a buddy or mentor to each new member.
17. At the end of the year, ask new members to evaluate the orientation process, and use the feedback to continuously improve.